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THE RULE OF FAITH



# THE RULE OF FAITH

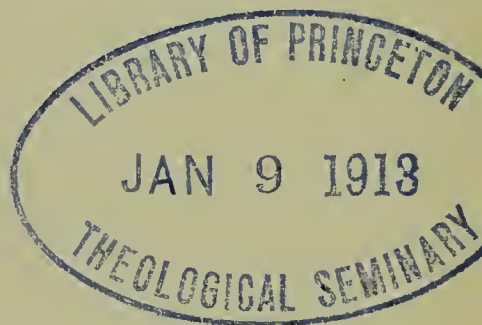
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BEING

THE BAIRD LECTURE FOR 1905

BY THE REV.

✓  
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HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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## P R E F A C E

THIS book is an enlarged and amended version of six lectures which were delivered in 1905 on the Baird Foundation under the title of 'The Substance and Standard of Christian Doctrine.' I am indebted to the Baird Trustees for the forbearance which they have shown in regard to delay in publication. My main excuse for the procrastination is that I wished to deal more thoroughly with a large subject than was possible in the brief course of lectures originally delivered, and my chief regret is that the improvement has not been commensurate with the delay. The book as it stands has a certain definiteness of scope as a study in the Prolegomena to Dogmatics. The short title which is now adopted is one which was naturalised both in Patristic and Protestant Theology, and the phrase has had a variety of scope which makes it legitimate to use it to cover the discussions alike as to the seat and the substance of doctrine. I hope that the Appendices may be of use to those

who have to study the important questions raised under this rubric of Fundamental Theology. My thanks are due to Mr. G. S. Duncan, M.A. (Edin.), B.A. (Cantab.), for help in revising the proofs, and for the compilation of the index.

W. P. PATERSON.

EDINBURGH.



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## INTRODUCTORY

THE Christian Church has always claimed to be in possession of a body of truth which excels in dignity and value all else that is called by the name of knowledge. To faith this inheritance of truth is matter of astonishment,<sup>1</sup> and even to unbelief it may well appear to challenge notice as one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the intellectual history of mankind. Christian doctrine has at least four features which peremptorily arrest attention.

To begin with, Christian thought embraces the most important of the subjects which have aroused the curiosity of the human mind. It pronounces on such vast and difficult themes as the being, the attributes and the purposes of God; the origin of the universe and of humanity; the principles of the divine government of the world; the spiritual constitution, the chief end and the destiny of man; and also the provisions framed by God, whether ordinary or extraordinary, for carrying His purposes into execution. Next,<sup>2</sup> this knowledge is conceived as possessing a practical value which is without a parallel in the field of human experience. It appears as truth which does work of a kind that is generally admitted to be pre-eminently worth doing, and also to be beyond the powers of any rival agency that works for human well-being. It is

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 33; 1 Cor. ii. 7-10,



held to constitute a saving provision, which, if appropriated and acted upon, has the effect of establishing a filial relationship with God, of re-creating and remoulding character, and of conveying a promise of life beyond the grave in conditions of perfected holiness and blessedness. Once more,<sup>3</sup> a unique origin is claimed for Christian knowledge as being in a peculiar and immediate way a gift of God. Ultimately, no doubt, all truth is from God; but it has been the persistent faith of Christendom that the verities of the Christian system, those especially which have efficacy against sin, sorrow and death, have been derived from a special revelation, and are to be placed in a different category from the hard-won gains of human observation and reflection. And lastly,<sup>4</sup> Christian doctrine has been welcomed by the human mind with a striking receptiveness and confidence. It has been received with lively gratitude, and it has been held with a tenacious grasp. Whatever be the true definition of faith, it is no essential mark of its Christian form that it operates with a low degree of assurance; for doctrines of the Creeds and Confessions have seemed to many in all ages to be the very antithesis of guess-work and mere probable opinion, to take rank among the most certain of the facts of existence, and to be of such assured value as to justify any sacrifice that might be called for in their witness and defence.

No doubt the history of Christian thought has had its striking vicissitudes. The spirit of theology has been somewhat capricious—so that it has sometimes happened that the controversies of an earlier age have seemed to its successor hardly to repay the trouble of trying to understand them. In recent times the general mind has been diverted to fields of literary and historical

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investigation ; and an impression has been fostered that theology, forgoing the quest of absolute truth, must content itself with inquiring what men believed in the classic ages of faith, and on what grounds they formed and expressed their convictions. But even in a time when doctrine might seem decadent, when systematic treatises have fallen into discredit, and a large part of the traditional material has lost its power of persuasion and appeal, testimony is still borne to the paramount interest of doctrine by the minute and exhaustive work that continues to be done in every field that has the remotest bearing upon the records of Christian origins and upon the development of the Christian Creed. It may also be observed that even in such situations a few truths collected at random by the pulpit or the family from the Christian tradition have continued to serve multitudes as the basis of their philosophy of existence, and as a gospel for life and death which they find to be beyond the reach of cavil. There is evidence, moreover, that the eclipse of doctrine cannot be more than a temporary episode in the history of the Church ; for the religious revival is a recurring phenomenon of history, and it has ever been accompanied by a revival of theological reflection in which a special group of truths has been brought into prominence, and has been re-appropriated by a measure of independent thinking and of fresh expression. A general survey of the history of Christianity leaves a profound impression of the power of a system of thought which has sometimes dominated, and has always enriched, the thinking of philosophical schools ; which has proved to be capable of giving to common folk and to children a working theory of the order of things and of their chief end ; and which has been prescribed by their rulers to empires



and kingdoms as the surest guide in their outlook upon existence and upon the path of duty. It lays such a spell upon the human mind that the Christian view of the world often survives as the chief stimulus even of the minds which reject it, and deserves more credit than any other factor for delivering them from intellectual stagnation.

Along with this notable inheritance, however, there has been transmitted to the Church a persistent problem. While the Church has had an ineradicable conviction that it possesses by special revelation a great treasure of wisdom and of knowledge, it has been troubled by controversy as to the precise repository in which the divine gift has been placed, and as to the method by which it is to be laid hold of and made available for human wants. It has found itself somewhat in the position of a man, who, falling heir to a fortune, is not altogether certain as to how much belongs to the estate, and as to the exact steps to be taken to claim and to realise his wealth. The question in brief is, what is the proximate source from which we collect the special Christian knowledge which is held to be derived from God as its primary source, and how is the source known to be trustworthy? For a variety of reasons this question had to be faced. To begin with, Christian faith has its abode in a mental constitution which harbours intellectual cravings and demands, and the latter would of themselves compel us to raise the question as to the nature and management of the source from which Christian knowledge is drawn. But in addition, the question has been pressed to the forefront from age to age by the external and the domestic conflicts of theology; and not least at the present day, whether we consider the challenge of non-Christian



thought, the clash of ecclesiastical systems, or the discord of theological schools, do we find ourselves forced back on the fundamental issue as to the nature and the strength of the foundation on which the Church stands in its profession and defence of the doctrine which it proclaims as revealed truth.

## I

The need for justifying the source and criterion of Christian knowledge has emerged in clamant form whenever the Christian Church has found itself in conflict with disbelief. In three periods in particular it has been called on to give reasons why its professed wealth of divine and saving knowledge should not be discounted as an aggregate of superstitions and illusions. In the patristic period it had to make its claim good against Judaism, and also against the religion and the philosophy of Greece and Rome. In the eighteenth century it was challenged to prove that anything which was true in its doctrine was also new, and that anything in it which was new was also true. In the nineteenth century it encountered still more radical opposition. Science taught that cosmical doctrines which had been supposed to be guaranteed by revelation were not in accordance with the facts of the universe, and it partially identified itself in consequence with naturalism and agnosticism. Historical investigation made it appear that the records of revelation contained a large human element, and that Christian doctrine, in the course of its development, had been mixed up with the wisdom of this world, and had borrowed freely from its reflections and speculations. In particular, modern philosophy busily occupied itself with a task of which

the method and the results alike were of doubtful omen for theology. Its special interest was in the question as to the nature and range of human knowledge; and it undertook to review, without regard to prepossessions or fear of consequences, the limits of man's cognitive powers, the origin of his ideas, and the validity of the accepted notions about the world, the self and God. Even when the result of the inquiry was a vindication of our title to a knowledge of transcendental reality, the positive statements were apt to be halting and meagre upon certain issues—such as the personality of God and the immortality of the soul—which from the religious standpoint are absolutely vital. The mind which has undergone the modern discipline of philosophic doubt is not predisposed to believe that the full and precise propositions about a realm of transcendental being and powers, which are propounded by theology, are capable of being authenticated as a real enlargement of the stock of human knowledge. Further, as it is the business of philosophy to do its best to solve ultimate questions without any reliance on an assumed revelation, it was inevitable that the special conditions under which it did its work were taken to supply the measure of the real and credible, even in the religious sphere. As the result of this combination of factors, Christian faith is now confronted by a world of culture which represents every shade of sympathy intermediate between whole-hearted belief and patronising tolerance, and also of every degree of opposition ranging from deistic criticism to materialistic dogmatism and agnostic contempt. In such conditions the question emerges with perhaps unparalleled urgency—What is the precise source of the reputed knowledge concerning the problems of exist-

ence which bears the Christian stamp, and why should it be taken on trust?

In responding to the challenge to prove its possession of valid knowledge Apologetics has had a choice between two lines of procedure, which have also frequently been combined. One method has been to attempt to establish the authority of a particular instrument or intermediary of revelation, and to demand acceptance of the doctrines and provisions of the Christian system out of deference to the proved trustworthiness of the agent by which they have been transmitted. The older school of apologists mainly followed this line—for which the precedent was given in apostolic thought<sup>1</sup>—and undertook to prove that in the Scriptures, or in the Apostles, or in the Christ who was foretold by prophecy and accredited by miracles, we possess a witness or witnesses whose authority commends the message as worthy of implicit trust. But while this type of argument cannot become wholly superfluous, since Christianity could not survive the discredit of the witnesses that have made it known to the later world, it has become increasingly clear that Christianity makes its way and holds its own by reason of the content of its message, and its demonstration of power, rather than in virtue of its external credentials. It seems true to the facts of experience to say that the message reflects authority upon those who transmitted it, rather than that to their testimony it owes its credibility. The alternative mode of argument, accordingly, has been to maintain that the Christian system, apart from its guarantee by a transmitting authority, carries its own evidence of being true, and also that in its unique content and importance it gives evidence of

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 22; Rom. i. 4; John xii. 37.



being in a unique sense divine. This argument, also, is deeply embedded in the New Testament. Our Lord's Synoptic teaching for the most part proceeds upon the footing that His words would find their way without question into the unprejudiced mind and the uncorrupted heart. In the Fourth Gospel it is emphatically taught that good men readily believe in Christ and His words; while St. Paul regarded the Gospel as working irresistible conviction in those who made trial of its provisions in the obedience of faith.<sup>1</sup> In the typical modern contributions to Apologetics ever increasing stress has been laid upon the consideration that Christianity shines by its own light and prevails by its own might, and that its best defence consists in the believing exposition of its inspiring and energising truths.

It will, however, be observed that the apologetic procedure which bases the case for Christianity upon its self-evidencing truth and power—relegating the so-called external evidences to a subordinate position, or even discounting them—is a method which presupposes a preliminary task of some difficulty. The Christian apologist has two tasks to face—to define the position which he desires to prove, and to develop the argument by which he seeks to prove it. And the difficulty of the apologist who works on modern lines is to frame a *thesis probanda* which will be sufficiently definite, and which can reckon on general acceptance. The thesis of the older apologists fulfilled these conditions, being formulated in such propositions as that the Scriptures are inspired writings which are entirely worthy of credit, or that the Apostles were competent and honest witnesses, or that Christ was shown to be

<sup>1</sup> John viii. 47; Rom. viii. 16, 17. Cf. John vii. 17.

the Son of God by the miraculous element in His life. On the other hand the effectiveness of the newer Apologetic is impaired by the fact that, while there is fairly general agreement as to the method of proof, there is serious disagreement as to the precise scope of the proposition to be proved. It is widely held that the proposition to be established is the truth of the Christian revelation, or of the Christian religion; but this is found to be compatible with very divergent views as to what is the authentic content of revelation, and what is the substance of the Christian religion. It is doubtful if apologetic treatises are much read outside of theological circles; but if they do penetrate to the world of unbelief, that world might forcibly retort that apologists should come to an understanding among themselves as to what the Christian religion is before they undertake to prove to non-Christians that it is true. Certain at least it is that nothing is more urgently needed as the presupposition of an effective defence of Christianity than a better agreement as to the essential content of the Christian religion, and as to the proper method of ascertaining it.

## II

The divisions of the Christian Church have also brought into marked prominence the problem as to the repository and criterion of Christian knowledge. Each of the great sections of organised Christendom exhibits some diversity of theory as to the channel by which revealed truth has been mediated and by which it is guaranteed. Differences on this head had something to do, if not with creating, at least with widening and perpetuating, the breach between Greek and Latin Christianity. In the chief points of principle, indeed,

the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are at one—it is agreed that revelation has been transmitted by the twofold channel of Scripture and tradition, and that there is an ecclesiastical organ which formulates the deposit of revealed truth with binding authority. On the other hand the Greek Church disputes the claim of the Papacy to a unique prerogative in the administration of doctrine, and it regards the later developments of Roman dogma as unauthorised. It was, however, at the Reformation that a conflict of views as to the nature and management of the Rule of Faith elevated the question to the position of a dominating issue. Protestantism threw out a challenge to the Roman Church which impugned at many points its system of doctrine, of discipline and of worship, and it soon appeared that there was a radical conflict of theory as to the standard by which its specific features were to be tested and valued. If, as the Protestants contended, the sole appeal was to Scripture, it was easy to show that much in the Roman system was corruption or excrescence. If tradition, as Rome held, was equally with Scripture a channel of the original revelation, it was evident that Protestantism was to be condemned as a mutilated form of Christianity.

Among the Churches ranking as Protestant the view taken of the Rule of Faith has also been to some extent a dividing factor. The alienation of the Reformed Church from the Lutheran was at least confirmed by a difference of attitude towards religious authority. The Lutheran Church was content to retain traditional elements so long as they were not in proved conflict with Scripture, while the Churches of the Reformed group acted on the rigorist canon that express Scriptural warrant was required to justify any-



thing which entered into the staple of the system of doctrine or worship, or which materially affected the government of the household of God. In this matter the Church of England associated itself with the Lutheran rather than with the Reformed maxim. Not only did it conserve much in worship and constitution which was traditional rather than Scriptural, but in the field of theology its typical thinkers have agreed with the Greek Church that the œcumenical Councils of the early centuries had a commission to interpret dogma with finality, and they find no form of dogmatic proof so congenial as that which is built up out of the testimonies of the Fathers. A radical breach with the Protestant principle was made by Quakerism, whose theory of the supremacy of the inner light forced it into a position of ecclesiastical isolation. Within the pale of Protestantism various modifications of the theory of the norm of doctrine have been propounded; but as these have commonly been held in conjunction with a protestation of loyalty to the fundamental Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture, the theological schools in which they have been promulgated have stopped short of asserting themselves in ecclesiastical schism. Evidence, however, is not wanting that on this issue—on which contemporary opinion covers the whole ground between the old Protestant orthodoxy and an almost unqualified rationalism—theological passion may in the near future break out with disruptive energy, and may prove even stronger than the irenic tendencies which have been making for the consolidation of Protestant Christianity.

Important and far-reaching, however, as has been the influence of conflicting theories as to the Rule of Faith, it would be a mistake to conceive that differences

of opinion on this head were the primary cause of the great ecclesiastical divisions. It is superficially plausible to say that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism differ in their conception of the doctrinal content of Christianity because they operate with different conceptions of the source and norm of doctrine, but in reality they maintain different views of the Rule of Faith because they have put a different interpretation upon essential features of the Christian religion. The prior and governing fact was a conviction that the system of divine and saving truth had been found, understood and applied; and the theory which was adopted as to the repository and test of truth was that which best supported and justified the conception that had been formed of the essential nature and content of Christianity. In saying that the interpretation of the essence of Christianity has ever moulded the theory as to the norm of Christian doctrine, there is of course no suggestion of insincerity. The Roman Catholic who believed in the absolute truth of Roman Catholicism was constrained also to believe that, if the Scriptures alone do not support the system in its entirety, there must be other equally good witnesses that supply the want. Similarly, the Protestant who found much in the Roman Catholic system that seemed to him to be false or degrading inevitably repudiated the authorities that were alleged in its support. From other periods of Church History there comes evidence that that theory of the norm was accepted as true which best supported what was believed on other grounds to be divine truth. The attitude of the Fathers as to the respective authority of Scripture and Tradition is somewhat fluctuating: the settled point for them was that a particular



interpretation of Christianity which ensured to it the value of a great salvation was the substance of revealed truth; and when confronted by heresies which seemed to rob it of this character they laid the stress on Scripture or Tradition according as each best served them for the time in maintaining what they were persuaded of as the truth of God.<sup>1</sup> Still more clearly did the argumentation of the heretical sects show the dependence of the theory of authority on the conception previously formed of the essentials of Christianity. When worsted in an appeal to Scripture, we are told, they fell back on an oral tradition, and when confuted by the evidence of an authentic tradition, they fell back on a revised conception of Scriptural authority.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Quaker mind, believing itself to possess a larger measure of revealed truth than could be extracted from the written Word, developed a theory of the inner light which gave it an apparent title to hold its new-found possessions with a good conscience. Socinianism professed to work with the old Protestant theory that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith; but when it was proved that its interpretation of Christianity was unbiblical it shifted to a rationalistic theory of the standard of doctrine, rather than revert to an orthodox system of doctrinal matter. The observation thus made is a confirmation of the conclusion reached in the previous section, that the question of most vital importance for theology is to reach a satisfactory definition of the essential content of the Christian religion. Were this generally agreed on, the question as to the source and norm of doctrine would be far on the way to settle itself.

<sup>1</sup> For evidence see the materials collected by Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, 1853, i. 368 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 2.

## III

The problem of the proximate source and norm of Christian knowledge is also raised in persistent form in the history of modern Protestant theology. In this history a leading motive was dissatisfaction with the earlier method of conceiving and administering the repository of doctrine, and a belief that it was possible to erect the system of religious truth on a firmer foundation. It may indeed be observed that every group of thinkers which ranks as a theological school has something characteristic in its conception of the source of doctrine, or in its way of administering it. This may be illustrated from the schools of British theology as recognised and designated in current speech. The Evangelical School works on the whole with the orthodox Protestant conception of Scripture as the revealed code of doctrine and morals, and also its own sufficient interpreter; the High Church School depends on the ancient and undivided Church as the authorised interpreter of the deposit of revealed truth; while the Liberal School is generally describable as magnifying the importance of the revelation which has been given through reason and conscience, and as labouring to bring Christian doctrine within the limits of the intelligible and the practical. It is, however, in the Lutheran Church that the really fresh, thorough and important thinking in this field has been done, and that the task has been systematically essayed of re-editing the doctrinal material in accordance with modified theories as to the basis of religious knowledge. The most important chapter in the modern history of theology is that which is bounded by the work of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and in its most conspicuous aspect this is

the story of the wrestling of modern theology with the problem of the Rule of Faith.

1. The situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as it presented itself to the devout German mind, was that the three classic theories of the Rule of Faith—the Roman Catholic, the old-Protestant and the rationalistic—had broken down, while yet there was a Christian faith which properly refused to be disinherited of the spiritual wealth to which it had been served heir. The question was, Is it still possible to lay the foundations, and to find the materials of a scientific theology? The first attempt to do the work under these conditions was made by Schleiermacher. It is obvious that just as a general scepticism, trying how far it can go, comes upon a barrier in the fact that it thinks, so a provisional religious scepticism encounters an incontestable reality in the fact that mankind is in possession of religious feelings. There is, now, a gamut of observable religious feeling, ranging from a vague sense of dependence on a Supreme Being to the intense and varied experiences of the saint, and it is also matter of observation that these feelings are closely bound up with religious beliefs. It is, further, the business of science to describe, to explain, to systematise; and the method of Schleiermacher promised to fulfil scientific requirements in handling this subject-matter. He undertook to formulate and to reduce to system the beliefs current in the Lutheran Church of his time, and he furnished a genetic explanation of them by tracing the different groups of doctrines to their source in a variety of religious feelings. Devout feeling was thus treated as the ultimate source of religious doctrine, and it also served as its criterion, since the perfection of any doctrinal statement was held to depend on the



success with which it expresses and interprets the feeling from which its thoughts were originally derived.

The school of Schleiermacher has been large and enduring if we reckon into it all modern theologians who have shared his starting-point, and sought to extract a theology from the data of religious experience. But as tested by theological result, it has been a house divided against itself, as well as against its master. His own elaborated system has seemed to some to contain more positive doctrine, to others to contain much less, than can be inferred from the phenomena of religious feeling. In the hands of one group his method has issued in the reduction of Christian doctrine to the barest residuum of knowledge, and that of a somewhat shadowy kind. In this succession the outstanding contributions are the *Glaubenslehre* of Alexander Schweizer, which exhibits a curious combination of evangelicalism and rationalism, and the work of Sabatier and other members of the Paris School, whose point of view may be expressed by saying that God vouchsafes religious experiences, but has left it to man to make his theology. Of the same type is James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in which the content of theology shrinks to a probable opinion that there is a higher spiritual world with which man can cultivate relations, and within which our prayers do some work. Another succession of thinkers, operating from the same base, have believed it possible to re-discover and re-establish the cardinal doctrines of historic Christianity. One notable representative of this school was Hofmann, who defined his method by saying that the theologian finds his subject-matter in himself regarded as a Christian.<sup>1</sup> Frank of Erlangen in his systems of *Christliche Gewissheit*<sup>2</sup> and *Christliche*

<sup>1</sup> *Der Schriftbeweis*, 1857, i. p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> E. Tr. *System of the Christian Certainty*, i., 1886.

*Wahrheit* also laboured to show that the regenerate experience can be made to yield and substantiate the main doctrines of the Catholic and Lutheran tradition.

2. The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of new schools of philosophical theology. It is no doubt true that in principle these schools occupy the same ground as the old Rationalism, in that they bring the doctrines of faith to the touchstone of reason; but there was greater willingness on the part of the philosophical masters to admit the rationality of the distinctive Christian doctrines, while some of the disciples were also able to make room for an additional principle of Christian knowledge. In striking contrast with eighteenth-century Rationalism, it was held that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, which had been declared offensively irrational, enshrine profound truths of a speculative or practical kind. The pioneer contribution was Kant's treatise on *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, in which he undertook to show that Christian doctrine, when intelligently expounded, tallied roughly with the main positions of his own ethico-religious system. It is, however, less by his exposition of the essential content of Christian doctrine than by his criticism of reason, and his conception of the nature and grounds of the knowledge claimed by faith, that Kant has left a deep impress on subsequent theology. Still more widely felt was the influence of Hegel, whose general point of view was that philosophy and religion have both been advancing, under the guidance of a rational principle, towards a goal; and that Christianity as the absolute religion, and Hegelianism as the final philosophy, have been endeavouring to think and to say the same things



in different ways. Hegel's own view of the substantial accord of his system with Christianity has been adopted by the main body of his British disciples. In particular Principal Caird's course of Gifford Lectures<sup>1</sup> may be cited as an illustration of the sense of illumination and of intellectual relief which is afforded by Hegelian thought in the handling of doctrines which the Church has often sought to impose upon the mind as mysteries to be humbly and blindly received. In Germany Hegelianism gave an impetus to a new doctrinal activity, and supplied the intellectual basis of contributions of high intellectual rank, which include the dogmatic work of Strauss and Pfleiderer, and reach the acme of scientific achievement in the *Christliche Dogmatik* of Biedermann. It is distinctive of this German group that its members conceived modern philosophy, as mediated through Hegel, to issue in a pantheistic rather than in a theistic view of the world, with the consequence that the supernatural was ruled out from the agencies at work in the universe, while the Christian hope of personal immortality was belittled or denied. In consequence they found it increasingly difficult—Strauss at an early stage had pronounced it impossible—to hold that the residuum of abstract thought which resulted from the criticism of dogma could be honestly proffered to the Church as the substance of its faith. In any case the original promise of service to theology was crossed by the discovery that the ultimate tendency of the system was interpreted by some of its ablest representatives to be, not the rescue, but the discredit and subversion of the Christian view of the world.

3. Concurrently with the work of the experimental

<sup>1</sup> *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 2 vols., 1899.

and the philosophical schools, and partly as a result of it, the conviction revived and deepened that the path of safety lay in a return, at least in principle, to an earlier standpoint. With the theology of feeling tending to evaporate into contributions towards religious psychology and pathology, and philosophical theology at issue with itself as to the doctrinal substance both of philosophy and theology, it was naturally felt that Christian thought would do wisely to fall back on the historical datum of the revelation of God in Christ, and on its Scriptural deposit and commentary. It was realised that it is only when theology takes seriously the fact of a revelation that it abides in its Father's house, and finds that it has bread enough and to spare. The later period, accordingly, witnessed the rise of a number of schools which made a common profession of founding on the Christian revelation, and of operating with a Scriptural standard of truth. This return to Scripture took place in various forms and degrees. In the Lutheran Church there arose a new Confessional School, represented by Philippi,<sup>1</sup> which rehabilitated in its main features the theology of the orthodox divines of the seventeenth century. The parallel in Reformed Theology is the monumental treatise of Charles Hodge,<sup>2</sup> who, though holding that Scripture is its own interpreter, was manifestly influenced by a confessional norm, and nowhere deviated from the interpretation of the content of Scripture which is embodied in the Creeds and in the Westminster Confession.

The general impression which was left by the theological work of modern times was that it was no longer

<sup>1</sup> *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, 6 Bde., 1854-79.

<sup>2</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., 1872.

possible to regard the Scriptures as a storehouse of texts which communicated supernatural knowledge on every matter to which they could be shown to be relevant, which could be pieced together into an elaborate whole as the system of revealed truth, and which had already been adequately interpreted and articulated in the ecclesiastical symbols. For one thing it had become clear that no school or system of theology ever existed which had used the whole Bible as authoritative Word of God, and unfolded its total content in a comprehensive system of faith and morals. The Reformers themselves did not do so, but selected the Pauline scheme of doctrine and the Johannine theology as the quintessence of Scripture, and they only utilised the rest of the complex biblical material in so far as it could be identified with the evangelical scheme, or could be made use of as an instructive and edifying addition. It had also become apparent, in the cultivation of Biblical Theology, that there is no absolutely uniform system of religious and moral ideas traceable throughout Scripture, and that the Canon is really the record of a process of revelation and of education in which religious knowledge grew to more and more, and in which ethical knowledge advanced from moderate levels of work-a-day virtue to the loftiest ideals of purity and love. From this established fact of a development it followed that a standard had to be sought whereby to value and control the manifold contents of Scripture. It could be honestly affirmed that Scripture was the supreme rule of faith, but with the qualification that the real standard was one which, while furnished by Scripture, was also needed for the interpretation and valuation of Scripture. It was found that the assertion of the authority of Scripture needed to be



supplemented by a definition of a particular content of Scripture for which normative authority was claimed. There are, however, different methods that have been followed in the attempt to establish an intra-scriptural norm, and we may fix attention on two types—that which discovers in Scripture an authority which vouches for a divine message, and that which regards the authority as attaching to a limited message of which Scripture is the repository.

(a) The first type of thought is widely held in the form that Christ and His Apostles are authoritative exponents of the word of revelation, and that all which they designed to teach touching faith and morals is absolutely trustworthy. Others, impressed with the secondary character of apostolic Christianity, and holding that the original message was seriously modified in Paulinism, have elevated to a supreme position the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, and have employed this as the norm for the interpretation and correction of the rest of the canonical literature. This latter theory has strongly appealed to many as the most probable solution of the difficulties touching the doctrinal standard which have been described as the crisis of Protestantism.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The other method by which an intra-scriptural norm has been won has been to fasten upon a particular self-authenticating message of Scripture as embodying the essential element of the Christian revelation. At this standpoint two crucial questions emerge. The first is, 'By what means, and under what conditions, does theology penetrate to this central and assured message

<sup>1</sup> It has been chiefly expounded and utilised in popular theology, but it has also a scientific defence and application in the system of Christian doctrine which was constructed by Wendt as a supplement to his monumental exposition of the *Lehre Jesu*.

of Scripture?' The second is, 'What is the doctrinal content thus discovered which is to be treated as regulative for Christian thinking?'

As to the means of identifying and apprehending the authentic content of revelation, there is somewhat general agreement that it is given in the apostolic principle that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. It is held that a Christian experience is the presupposition of the title to handle the subject-matter, as well as of any reasonable prospect of success in handling it; and that the appropriating energy is Christian faith, or reason saturated by the Christian spirit. This conception is elaborately expounded by Dorner in the fundamental part of his doctrinal system.<sup>1</sup> He projects a special science of faith, of which the leading idea is that there are inadequate types of faith resting either on external authority or on rational grounds, and that these give place in a sound development to a faith resting on a personal experience of salvation. His view, summarily stated, is that it is necessary first to traverse the stages which culminate in the experience of redemption through Christ, of peace with God, and generally of the satisfaction of religious and ethical needs; and that the saving faith which claims these blessings involves an assured insight which is the starting-point of scientific religious knowledge. 'The content which faith appropriates from Scripture,' he adds, 'is the immediate object of dogmatic theology.'<sup>2</sup> The Ritschlian school similarly magnifies the indispensableness, competency and responsibility of a personal faith in sifting and interpreting the data of revelation which are attested in Scripture. 'Scripture,'

<sup>1</sup> *Christliche Glaubenslehre*, E. Tr. *System of Christian Doctrine*, 4 vols., 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 145 ff.

says Kaftan, 'is the exclusive and proper source of knowledge which is drawn on in Christian dogmatics, since it is the unique and authentic original monument of the historical revelation of God from whose appropriation by faith Christian knowledge arises.'<sup>1</sup> The same idea is expressed in the reiterated declaration that revelation and faith are co-relative terms. 'Revelation addresses itself to faith,' he says again, 'and it is only through faith, which involves a transformation of the personal life, that it leads to a knowledge of the truth therein communicated.'<sup>2</sup> In such statements we have doubtless a correct description of the actual method by which the substance of the various systems of theology has been won from the Scriptural records of revelation. Nor can it be said that the older theology was altogether blind to the fact that what it made of Scripture was due in large measure to the insight and the tact which accompany a saving faith. The general fact on which the Ritschlian affirmations are based is the same which Calvin observed when he spoke of the authentication of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit testifying from within the spiritual mind. This observation had been too deeply impressed on Protestant theology to be permanently lost sight of; and it was renewed whenever a deepening of the spiritual life brought new inspiration and power into theology. It should also be added that when stress is laid on faith as the instrument for the apprehension of divine truth, there is an easy transition to the type of theology which leans on ecclesiastical definitions. For it is a not unnatural view that, if we have to trust to faith for the interpretation of the data of revelation, it is wise to distrust the verdict of an individual or sectional faith, and to

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmatik*, 1897, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.



fall back upon the faith of the collective Christian mind which has expressed itself in widely accepted ecclesiastical symbols. The method may also become somewhat rigidly biblical, as it is arguable that the faith of the theologians cannot compare in spiritual insight and tact with that of the men of the first age to whom we owe the Scriptures of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, is the content of the Scriptures which is appropriated by faith, and which is normative for dogmatic theology? 'The Gospel,' says Lobstein, 'the Word of God, Revelation: these sublime and sacred words which in our schools are necessarily framed into formulas and dogmas, but whose inexhaustible wealth and divine content we must ever grasp anew, this spiritual reality which we only understand in the measure in which we surrender ourselves to its dominion—this is the religious authority in the evangelical and Protestant sense. This authority has a name in history—Jesus Christ.'<sup>2</sup> This general statement commands wide assent; but the definition of the authority as the Gospel is consistent with wide divergence of opinion as to its material content. For Dörner the essential element is the Christian idea of God, which is found to involve the substance of the Catholic determinations of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, and which leads to the progressive appropriation of a large complex of dogmatic knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In Lobstein's view, which reflects the

<sup>1</sup> A recent book persuasively develops the idea that if we begin with reverence for our own religious intuitions, we cannot withhold reverence from those of the Christian society, and still less from the intuitions of the spiritual aristocracy of the prophets and apostles.—Leckie, *Authority in Religion*, 1909, ch. vi. ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Einleitung in die evangelische Dogmatik*, 1896, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, i. p. 157 ff.



dominant conception of the Ritschlian school, the Gospel consists essentially in the fact that God gives to believing men an experience of salvation.<sup>1</sup> There is a larger element of doctrine involved in the definition in which Ritschl himself sums up the essence of the Christian religion. It will therefore be a considerable part of our task to examine the adequacy of these modern conceptions of the doctrinal basis and implications of the Gospel which have the note of authority.

It should also be pointed out that the mind of the Reformed churches had long realised the reality of this issue, and had made some contribution towards its settlement. There is a voluminous literature of the Reformed church, extending through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to recent times, in which an attempt was made to formulate the fundamental as distinguished from the non-fundamental doctrines of Christianity; and this gives clear indication that a pressing need was felt for attaining a better perspective of doctrine, and for gaining a central position from which the whole region could be controlled. The work of Francis Turretin in this field,<sup>2</sup> and the similar work of the Anglican divines of the eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> were the preliminary attempts on a problem which the churches of the Reformed group are now called on to re-examine in the light of a better knowledge of the chief end of Scripture, and of the genius of Christianity as that has

<sup>1</sup> 'As Word of God the Gospel is not an abstract doctrine, which is calculated to increase the sum of our intellectual knowledge, but a creative act which can liberate and renew our souls. The true revelation is a resurrection from the dead, a new birth, a second creation within the human race.' Kaftan defines it as essentially self-communication of God, which, however, lays the foundation of actual religious knowledge.—*Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 1688, i. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Waterland, Works, 1823, vol. viii., *A Discourse of Fundamentals*, with bibliographical note.

been elucidated by a fuller acquaintance with the religions of the world, and with its own doctrinal development.

From the foregoing survey it is seen that the topic of the Rule of Faith includes two branches of inquiry. It includes the question, agitated through ages of controversy, as to the repository to which the data of the Christian revelation have been entrusted, and in which they have been brought within the reach of mankind. To this phase of the subject the first division of these lectures is devoted. It has, however, been indicated, and it will appear more fully in the sequel, that the question as to the seat of Christian doctrine cannot be separated from the question as to the substance of Christian doctrine, that the latter was the deeper and dominating issue which gave point and vitality to the earlier controversies, and that the real goal of the theological quest is a material norm consisting of the central and guaranteed body of Christian truth. In the second division an attempt will accordingly be made to determine the essential intellectual content of the Christian religion, as attested in its original and authentic record, and as observable in its performance of its appointed work in the world; and the criterion thus gained will be employed in valuation and criticism of the principal forms, ecclesiastical or scholastic, which Christianity has assumed in the course of its theological development.

For the following contribution no claim of novelty is made save such as may be made by every writer who gathers ideas from many quarters and expresses them in his own way. The governing idea is that we have to approach theology with an intense realisation that our

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primary datum is a religion, which as such undertakes to produce practical results, and that our primary certitude is that the Christian religion is an effective instrument for grappling with the heavy spiritual tasks which it undertakes to accomplish. Christianity is most fitly compared to the medical art, which addresses itself to the remedy of evils and the insurance of well-being in an analogous sphere. The parallel also makes it clear that as a religion Christianity involves a theology. While medicine is essentially practical in its purpose, it can only fulfil its preserving and healing mission on a basis of knowledge—to some extent also on the condition of imparting knowledge to the patients under treatment. Similarly it is indispensable that an effective religion should be founded on the facts of the Divine Being, of the universe, and of human nature; and also that, to a greater extent even than in the parallel case, those who are subjected to its protecting and curative influences should be taken into confidence. The Christian religion necessarily involves a body of truths, either as the presupposition or as the means of doing its work, and these are properly regarded as an integral part of the revelation. On the other hand, the essentially practical purpose of religion creates a presumption that the intellectual element in revelation was restrained by a principle of parsimony, and that it does not extend beyond the region in which it was required as the means of making the provisions of the Christian religion operative and effective. Our conception of the authentic content of revealed truth would thus be that it is the knowledge of God and man, and of the acts of God, which was needed to ensure the efficacy of the Christian religion. On the other hand, for all religious doctrine which merely serves a speculative interest no higher claim



will be made than that at the most it represents sound reasoning upon data of revelation, or probable opinion upon various problems that start up on the circumference of the religious sphere. In other words, the intellectual content of the revelation attested in Scripture consists in such knowledge as 'maketh wise unto salvation'; and no provision can be depended on for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity in regard to problems of which, without detriment to our religious standing and our spiritual life, we can afford to be ignorant.



A.—THE SEAT OF DOCTRINE



## CHAPTER I

### THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEORY

It is expedient to begin with the theory, marked by its accustomed definiteness, thoroughness and courage, by which the Roman Catholic Church justifies the unfaltering dogmatism that marks its pronouncement on every point of faith and morals. The question of the seat of authority had occasionally emerged in the doctrinal controversies of the patristic period; but it was not until the Reformation that the issues were fully thought out, and that the conflicting theories were formulated which were to dominate the thought, or to provoke the protest, of the religious mind of modern times. It may be added that in discussing the Roman theory we are also concerned—until we reach the Papal claim—with the general conception held by the Greek Church as to the source and norm of Christian doctrine.

The Roman Catholic theory was developed in two stages: first, by the decrees of the Council of Trent, which defined the channels of revelation; and, secondly, by the Vatican decrees, which settled the controversy as to the ecclesiastical organ to which the supreme responsibility has been entrusted in the custody and interpretation of the deposit of truth.<sup>1</sup>

#### I

The preliminary point to be noted in the Roman Catholic scheme is the emphatic declaration that

<sup>1</sup> See App. C for illustrative passages. The text followed is that of Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 4th ed., 1884, vols. i. and ii.

Christian doctrine is revealed doctrine—a supernatural gift of knowledge touching God and divine things. A general revelation is recognised as made to human reason through the works of Creation and Providence, but this is declared to be insufficient for human needs, and to have been supplemented by a special revelation which should enable man to attain his chief end.<sup>1</sup> The idea that Rome teaches any doctrine which has not been received by revelation through Christ, or through the Prophets and Apostles, is emphatically repudiated. The Gospel which Christ promulgated, and which He commanded to be preached, it is taught, is ‘the fountain of all, both saving truth and moral discipline.’ The only distinction was in the mode of communication—some portions being dictated by His own word of mouth, while others were conveyed by Him through the agency of the Holy Ghost. From this point of view to treat any doctrine as uncertain is to be guilty of unbelief, and to treat any as secondary or unimportant is to impugn the divine wisdom to which it seemed good to make it known.

1. The second and more distinctive part of the scheme is the account given of the provision which was made for the preservation and transmission of the doctrine and of the disciplinary rules that formed the subject-matter of the revelation by Christ. The channels of revelation are two—the Word of God written, and the Word of God unwritten, or the oral tradition, ‘which has come down even unto us transmitted as it were from hand to hand.’ The Scriptures, which are held to include the Old Testament Apocrypha and to be given in the Vulgate in the form authoritative for theology, are declared to have God for their author and

<sup>1</sup> *Concilii Vaticani Decreta Dogmatica de Fide Catholica*, cap. ii.



to be without admixture of error. By the unwritten Word is meant, not a tradition which has remained unwritten, for it eventually found literary expression in a variety of ways, but a body of teaching which was handed on orally by Christ and His Apostles to the succeeding generation. These unwritten traditions form an important supplement to the written Word by revealing the mind of Christ, otherwise undisclosed, upon capital points of doctrine, worship and discipline; while they also, in virtue of their clearness, supply the standard which is called for by the obscurity and the manifoldness of Scripture. The oral tradition thus appears to be the more necessary and the more serviceable of the two channels of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

In Roman Catholic theology various observations are made as to the primitive unwritten traditions, and to these remarks no serious objection can be taken except that they do not justify the argumentative use which is made of them. It is certain that there was an oral tradition touching the life and doctrine of Jesus by which the Church lived for a generation before it possessed the first of our canonical Gospels. It is certain that this tradition must originally have been wider in its scope than our written record. There was a time when men remembered and related things concerning our Lord and His Apostles which our Evangelists have not recorded. It may also be supposed that during the first century it was the spoken testimony of the evangelist and the teacher, rather than a Christian literature, which was the most effective instrument in the propagation of the Gospel among those who were

<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church expressly adopts the dogmatic principle of Scriptural interpretation, and makes the consent of the Fathers a supreme test of correct exegesis.—*Conc. Trid.*, sess. iv.

without, and in the edification of the members of the household of faith. It would also be most credible, even if this were not expressly affirmed by Irenæus and Tertullian, that there was a continuity in the Christian message, and that the type of Christian teaching which was formed in the Apostolic age continued to be reproduced in the instruction of succeeding generations. It must be supposed that the Church of the second century inherited, and recapitulated in its main features, a form of doctrine bearing the impress of the Apostolic age, in the same way that the Protestant Church of the seventeenth century was dominated by the doctrinal tradition of the Reformation. But even when those tolerably evident statements have been made, much is still wanting to make good the position that there was an oral tradition descending from Christ and His Apostles which sanctioned the specific features of the Roman Catholic system of doctrine, worship and government.

To begin with, there is no evidence that any considerable body of reminiscences survived in the Church in addition to those which were incorporated in the New Testament. The attempt was made to recover more of the precious material by investigators of the second century, such as Hegesippus and Papias, but we owe to their labours little more than the suggestion by Papias of a contribution to the Synoptic problem. The Apostolic tradition appealed to by writers of the second century manifestly was a general doctrinal tradition, such as would be associated in modern times with the pulpit of a particular communion, and which would vouch for the substantial content of the Christian message. We shall hardly err if we suppose the tradition in question to have been roughly identical with the material of the Apostles' Creed in its original form.

It is also most credible that, from the Apostolic age downwards, the Church in its public teaching had enforced the observance of the Lord's day, and it is probable that it had also from the beginning inculcated the practice of Infant Baptism. But it may be quite true that there was an inheritance by way of tradition from the Apostolic age, and yet palpably and ludicrously false that our debt to the Apostolic age includes the doctrines and rules which give its distinctive character to the Roman Catholic system. Some of these were demonstrably late in appearance—*e.g.* the doctrine of Purgatory which had not even become a probable opinion in the time of Augustine, the doctrine of the seven sacraments which was only matured in the late period of the Middle Ages, and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin which only became an article of faith in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As some of the doctrines and ceremonies in question were matter of prolonged controversy, we are shut up to the dilemma that either there was no organ in the Church which was in possession of authoritative traditions on the subject, or that it was guilty of a grave dereliction of duty in so long withholding the assured knowledge, and thus became a sharer in the guilt of will-worship and error.

In support of the position that its characteristic doctrines, rites and rules are derived from Christ and His Apostles, a show of historical proof is offered by Roman Catholic theology in a list of the notes or tests of tradition.<sup>2</sup> But the historical evidence adduced in this form is extremely elusive and unconvincing. In

<sup>1</sup> That Roman Catholicism is a colossal system of innovations is the thesis of the most learned patristic work in Scottish Theology—John Forbes, *Instructiones Historicae Theologicae*, 1645.

<sup>2</sup> See App. D, Bellarmine on the Criteria of Apostolic Traditions.



default of Scriptural testimony, universal acceptance is regarded as sufficient evidence of a divine tradition, but this is not forthcoming in the case of the doctrines and practices which Rome is most anxiously concerned to substantiate. The test of Catholicity,<sup>1</sup> if applied in straightforward fashion, and not reduced to mean the consent of some persons in a particular Church or period, is the most damaging and discrediting to which the Roman Catholic Church could appeal. It is also alleged that consent of the doctors of the Church marks out a doctrine as belonging to the Apostolic tradition. But this consent does not mean that all have expressly taught it: it is sufficient that some have borne witness to the truth, and that others have not contradicted it. It is not even necessary that a majority should have taught the true doctrine: in some periods it has been in the custody of a minority, and these not always of the greatest authority. But in procedure of this kind, although the ostensible object is to collect evidence, the actual achievement is to collect a friendly jury. A further mark which is given of divine and apostolic traditions is that they were witnessed to in churches founded by the Apostles. Of the churches with this privilege Rome received the largest gift, and continuing as it does to this day, its testimony to tradition is conclusive. It is, however, by no means a self-evident historical proposition that an institution can be trusted to remain true to the principles of its founder, and to hand down the original inheritance without diminution or corruption. It is certain that the Church in Rome, which was abundantly instructed by Apostles, must have entered on its course as a richly furnished witness to the Apostles' doctrine; but there is

<sup>1</sup> See App. B, The Vincentian Rule.



no solid proof that it possessed a stock of tradition which anticipated the capital problems raised in subsequent centuries, and there is no guarantee that it faithfully preserved and administered the original deposit. Conducted on the purely historical basis, the whole argument is extremely unconvincing, and it is not surprising that a supplementary dogmatic proof was introduced. 'All these things,' to quote the final test, 'are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith . . . which the Church, either by a solemn judgment, or by her ordinary and universal magisterium, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.'<sup>1</sup> The historical inquiry is thus closed by appeal to the infallible Church: it teaches nothing new, and nothing but what is true, and therefore what it teaches must have been delivered by Christ and His Apostles.

2. It is not surprising that Protestants are sceptical as to an unwritten tradition which is said to have conveyed from Christ and His Apostles practically the whole system of Roman Catholic dogma, worship and discipline. The incredulity has been shared by an important group of Roman Catholic thinkers. It was realised by Döllinger, Möhler and Newman that it is an anachronism to carry back every important element of the system to the Apostolic age; and it was hoped that, in disburdening the Church of this historically untenable proposition, the way would be cleared for a more convincing defence of its doctrines and laws, conceived as a legitimate development from the original data that had been carried out by an accredited authority. 'Time is necessary,' says Newman, 'for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to

<sup>1</sup> Conc. Vatican., *De Fide Catholica*, cap. iii.

the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but have required longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation.' To this process, it is added, there are many analogies. We may compare the original stock of revelation to geometrical axioms and postulates, the work of the Church upon it to the intellectual labour which has given us the Books of Euclid. A still better parallel is found in the way in which a body of first principles is progressively elaborated, and worked out to a consistent whole, in a political constitution, a scheme of morals or a metaphysical system. The Episcopate is an example of a legitimate and necessary political development within the Church, the Holy Eucharist of a moral, the Athanasian Creed of a metaphysical development.<sup>1</sup> ✓

The Roman Catholic system is certainly the result of a development, and it has worked out with great consistency and thoroughness a body of fundamental principles. But the further question arises as to whether the principles which underlie and condition the various lines of development have all alike been derived from a Christian source, and make up a homogeneous Christian whole. It is generally granted from the Protestant side that the dogmas of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ have been collected by way of necessary inference and development from the facts of revelation attested in the original records. But it is a much more difficult task to show that the doctrines which have been elaborated to form the Roman Catholic scheme of salvation, including its developed sacramental theory, are an explication of the original deposit of the teaching of Christ and of the Apostles.

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1845, p. 27 ff.

They represent the implications of, and the deductions from, a mediæval conception of Christianity which has been modified by the intrusion of elements that are alien to the original genius of the Christian religion. They fail to satisfy Newman's first test of a true development—viz. the preservation of type or idea.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of a doctrinal development has not been endorsed in the later pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican Council expressly laid down that the Church exercises its dogmatic power, not to declare new doctrines, but to 'expound the revelation or deposit of faith that was delivered through the Apostles.'<sup>2</sup> It prefers to encumber itself with all the difficulties of a palpable historical fiction, rather than expose itself to the damaging charge of innovation, and thus forgo the advantage which the assertion of the possession of unchanging truth, and of the direct support of the teaching of Christ, inevitably entails in an appeal to the general religious mind.

## II

It is the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church which lends such plausibility as it possesses to the authority of an oral tradition, and we have next to discuss the genesis and to examine the validity of this more fundamental tenet. It is, to begin with, supremely intelligible that the doctrine of an infallible Church should have come to be propounded. For every branch of the visible Church acts upon an assumption which is only separated by degrees from the Roman Catholic doctrine of infallibility. It is the

<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussion of Newman's tests, see Mozley, *The Theory of Development*, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> *De Ecclesia Christi*, cap. iv.



firm conviction of every Church which is a living and believing Church, that it is in possession of truth which is eternal and unchangeable, and that even if theoretically it be capable of erring it has, as a matter of fact, been preserved from essential error. It is wholly out of accord with the genius of a Christian Church that it should admit the possibility of its having wandered far from the truth, and should make profession that its creed is possibly, even probably, erroneous, and that a later and wiser generation may confidently be expected to effect upon it radical alterations and improvements. Similarly, when a Church takes a practical decision in matters of policy or discipline, it lies in the nature of the case that it believes itself to have been guided to take the only wise and right course. And clearly there is an easy transition from the belief that a Church is essentially in the right to the belief that it always has been and always will be in the right. There is a principle which has been termed the expansion of feeling, in virtue of which a particular lively experience tends to inundate the whole of consciousness, and to infect it with a prevailing character of joy or sorrow, of optimism or pessimism, of self-confidence or self-distrust. Feeling absolutely sure of the truth of certain things which it teaches and does as a custodian of the Christian religion, the Roman Catholic Church has treated this experience as typical of its whole dealings with doctrinal truth in the past and in the time to come. But it is only the person or institution concerned that can imagine it to be a valid inference that, because one has been right in some important things, therefore one must always be right in all things.

There is a somewhat weighty argument for the infallibility of the Church which founds upon the



analogy of the Faith, and upon the human wants to which a divine response has been made in the Christian revelation. A divine revelation, it may seem, requires an infallible interpreter, since it may be so misunderstood that its intention is frustrated, while a revelation that is not understood leaves us no better off than if it had been withheld. 'The Church,' says Möhler, 'must be immune from error, for it is inconceivable that the soul which trusts to it should be led astray.'<sup>1</sup> So weighty is this consideration, especially when taken in conjunction with Christ's promise of the Spirit to lead into all the truth, that we cannot doubt that there is, and ever has been, a witness of the Church which is sufficient for the guidance of those who come to it in quest of religious enlightenment. But consistently with the acceptance of this principle, various questions emerge which are not necessarily answered in the sense of the Church of Rome. What is the nature of the Church, it must be asked, to which the promise is made, and whose testimony is to be trusted? The Roman Catholic view is that it is identical and co-extensive with a section of the visible Church. But it may well be that the object of the promise rather is the household of faith, which consists of those, and only of those, who base their lives upon the Gospel, and who enjoy living communion with the Church's Head. It may be believed that the company of the faithful constitute a Church which has ever held a firm grasp of the saving truths of revelation, while yet it may be held that the organised Church has enjoyed no immunity from error—has in fact at times pronounced wrongly when it might have had better knowledge, and at times has undertaken to settle matters of

<sup>1</sup> *Symbolik*, 6<sup>te</sup> Auf. 1843, p. 336.

which it was ignorant. Further, if faith in Providence, as would seem, requires us to relate the promise in some degree to the organised and visible Church, the question arises as to what Church or Churches are the heirs of the promise. It may be that the Churches of Christendom, coming together in humility and in charity, as well as in dependence on divine help, would be assured of the needed guidance, while yet it may be an utterly incredible hypothesis that God has bestowed the office of infallible teacher upon a particular fragment which maintains the Roman attitude of uncharitable and hostile isolation in the family of Christendom.<sup>1</sup>

What again was meant by 'all the truth' into which guidance was promised by the Spirit? It cannot have been all possible knowledge of all divine things, for by universal consent we still know only in part, and the promise must be restricted to the truth of the Gospel of Christ, and its necessary implications. It is quite arbitrary to suppose that it conveys a safe-conduct in precisely that portion of the realm of possible knowledge which a particular Church has chosen to explore, and about which it has thought fit to dogmatise.

It would certainly create a strong impression in favour of the doctrine in question if it could be shown that it is in accord with the idea of Christianity as the perfect religion, by enabling us to trust the Christian salvation with more assurance, and to profit more fully by its provisions. But it is only superficially plausible that the idea of a revealed religion involves the comple-

<sup>1</sup> Quemadmodum haec una ecclesia (catholica) errare non possit in fidei ac morum disciplina tradenda, cum a Spiritu Sancto gubernetur; ita ceteras omnes quae sibi nomen ecclesiae arrogant, ut quae diaboli spiritu ducantur, in doctrinae et morum perniciosissimis erroribus versari necesse est.—*Cat. Rom.*, i. 10, 18.

ment of an infallible interpreter. A common method of the divine working is expressed in the Parable of the Talents; and it is entirely consistent with this method that God should be believed to have made a great gift to the world in the Christian revelation, and should thereafter have laid upon mankind a great trust and responsibility in the way of preserving and appropriating it. It is also to be observed that in the still more important matter of holiness the divine character of the Church has not preserved it from much infirmity and corruption; and it would be contrary to the analogy of the course of grace if it should be supposed that while the Church had been allowed to fall into the worse calamity of sin it had been miraculously saved from the lesser evil of theoretical error. Yet again, it is by no means clear that it would have been an advantage for mankind to be able to lean upon an infallible Church. In the affairs of this world it is well understood that the greater benefit is to give the use of capital which demands self-effort and independent labour on the part of the recipient, and that the lesser benefit, which may even be a curse in disguise, is to enable a beneficiary to live exclusively upon a provision which saves him from all necessity of real self-effort. It is true that a special revelation was required to save us from blindness and weakness, but it is also true that a revelation which imposes responsibilities upon us was needed to save us from intellectual stagnation. An infallible Church which could decisively settle all that the Roman Catholic Church claims power to settle would be a deadly menace to the intellectual life of the race, and we may take it for granted that in the perfect religion God has cared for the mind.

Even if it were admitted that the provision of an



infallible Church would increase the efficiency and comfort of the Christian religion, the presumption thus created would still have to be tested by facts, and would have to be rejected if the facts rebelled against it. In reality the theory comes into conflict with the fact that no ecclesiastical organ has given evidence of being invested with infallibility in its handling of doctrines. At different times reliance has been placed upon different organs as the seat of infallibility, and it is difficult to defend either on the ground of its constitution or the results of its work.

i. According to one view, which can claim support from a high antiquity, the visible Church has an infallible interpreter of divine truth in the episcopate. On the appearance of the specialised episcopate in the second century it was welcomed by Ignatius as the guardian of the truth, while in much later times it has been held that the existence of an episcopal order affords the best security that a Church will be preserved from heresy, and confirmed in loyalty to the Catholic faith. It was to bishops in Council assembled that the undivided Church entrusted the work of judging the grave doctrinal controversies of antiquity, and of determining the form of orthodox doctrine. The Council of Chalcedon speaks of the bishops who met at Nicæa as having been inspired by the Holy Ghost. The Council of Constance of 1414 declared the General Council, as representative of the Church, to be the supreme authority on earth, and consequently the channel of Papal authority.<sup>1</sup> And the issue thus raised

<sup>1</sup> *Ipsa Synodus in spiritu sancto congregata legitime generale concilium faciens, ecclesiam catholicam militantem repræsentans, potestatem a Christo immediate habet, cui quilibet cujuscunque status vel dignitatis, etiamsi papalis existat, obedire tenetur in his quæ pertinent ad fidem et exstirpationem dicti schismatis, et reformationem generalem ecclesie Dei in capite et in membris.—Concil. Const., sess. iv.*



is whether an episcopal organ is ideal, or even reliable, for the purpose.

In the first place it may be observed that the history of religion does not predispose us to place much trust in the ecclesiastical Council as an instrument for the administration of religious truth. In the Old Testament the great man who was also a saintly man was the chosen instrument of religious enlightenment and progress; and where we can trace the hand of a collective body, as in the legal codes, the work does not maintain the highest levels of the ethical religion of the old dispensation. In the life of Christ we find still greater reason to distrust the official religious organ. In Apostolic times there is the weighty precedent of the Council of Jerusalem; but this was an unimportant factor in the life of the Apostolic age in comparison with the individual contributions of Peter and Paul; and it is rather remarkable that there is a portion of its finding which Christendom is unanimous in disregarding. 'If you love me, condole with me,' wrote Gregory the Great, 'because my worldly business is so exacting that my promotion to the episcopate almost means my separation from God.'<sup>1</sup> Without impropriety the question may be raised if the tenure of the office of the episcopate is convincing evidence of competency to interpret revealed truth, and does not rather carry with it certain obvious disqualifications. While the episcopate has embraced much of the piety and of the learning of the Church, and may also be supposed to have a keener instinct than the theologians for the practical bearings of doctrine, its point of view must be largely dominated by the Churchman's standard of expediency, and it must also be largely affected by the declining idealism of middle life and by the timidity of old age. Its *raison d'être* is

<sup>1</sup> *Epist. Lib.*, i. 30.

found in the necessity of machinery of government, and the desirability of fully utilising administrative capacity; and the principle of the division of labour suggests the possibility of framing a specialised organ which would be better suited to the work of the definition of doctrine. An adequate organ would need to be fully representative of the learning, of the sanctity, and above all of the prophetic element in the Church at a particular time; and this would doubtless have been contemplated and acted on but for the prepossession due to the unhistorical theory that the episcopate is an element in a divinely revealed type of ecclesiastical constitution.<sup>1</sup>

In Protestant polemics it has also been emphasised that the episcopal organ has been discredited by the manner in which the proceedings of Councils have been conducted. 'Belief in the infallibility of Councils,' says Salmon, 'can hardly be held by any one who has studied their history, and who knows anything of their violence and party spirit, and of the bad arguments on the strength of which many of their infallible conclusions were arrived at.'<sup>2</sup> It is a more decisive consideration that they cannot all have defined sound doctrine, inasmuch as they have not agreed one with another. The Councils are divided by Bellarmine into four classes—nineteen whose decrees have been approved by the Pontiff and received by Catholics; eight which are condemned; six which have been partly confirmed and partly condemned, and one which has not been clearly confirmed or condemned.<sup>3</sup> It does not

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Jewel says many things about the episcopal order which are too rude and even scurrilous to quote, but he is at least right in thinking that a bishop may have less spiritual insight than a pious layman.—*Apology of the Church of England*, Works, 1848, iii. 193 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *The Infallibility of the Church*, 3rd ed., 1899, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> *De Conciliis et Ecclesia*, lib. I. cap. iv.

even appear that a Council was trustworthy in proportion as it was large and representative, otherwise the 'Robber-Synod' of Ephesus would claim equal respect with the Council of Chalcedon, and would be held in no less honour than the Council of Nicæa. But if only those General Councils were infallible which are now believed to have been in the right, it seems clear that infallibility is a very inappropriate word to describe what may be expected of the institution.

ii. Since the Vatican Council, the theory of the authoritative organ has been settled by the promulgation of the decree affirming the supreme dogmatic power of the Roman Pontiff. It is no longer a tenable opinion that the Pope, in making doctrinal pronouncements, acts as the mere representative and by authority of the Church, and that his decisions are subject to confirmation or veto either by a General Council or by the judgment of the Church as a whole. 'We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Conc. Vatican., *De Ecclesia Christi*, cap. iv. The last clause is a repudiation of the proposition of the Gallican school: 'non esse irreformabile iudicium Summi Pontificis, donec universalis Ecclesie consensus accesserit.'



(a) The biblical and historical evidence which is urged in support of the dogma of the Papal primacy is extremely slender. The biblical proof consists of four stages: that Peter was invested with the primacy over the other Apostles by which he was constituted their guide, teacher and ruler; that this prerogative was not a mere personal dignity, but was intended to be handed on to his successors; that he became Bishop of Rome, and as such exercised the primacy; and that those who succeeded him in the Roman see have inherited his powers. It is now generally conceded by Protestant exegesis that the rock on which Christ promised to build His Church was Peter—not his confession; but even so, it need not mean more than that Peter was to render the most signal services as the leader of the Church in her earliest period. For the rest, every chain of the argument is more or less weak. It is not proved that Peter himself possessed the primacy which is claimed for him. The power of binding and loosing, which in one passage is granted to him, is spoken of in another as granted to the company of the disciples.<sup>1</sup> The glimpses which we have of the primitive Church show Peter in association with James and John as the acknowledged heads of the Christian society, while Paul assuredly did not regard him as commissioned to speak the decisive word on the controversies of the Apostolic age. On the Roman theory we should have expected the New Testament writings to have claimed the *imprimatur* of Peter or of his successor. It is an excess of critical caution to doubt that Peter even sojourned in Rome, but there is no sufficient ground for believing that he ever presided over the Roman Church as its bishop. And finally, there is no proof

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. xvi. 19 with Matt. xviii. 18.



whatever that he was enabled, and that he intended, to transmit his problematical powers to his hypothetical successors.

The general doctrine of the Primacy leads up to the special doctrine of papal infallibility. This, it is claimed, finds support in Scripture in the passages which point to the institution of the primacy in St. Peter. Particular and express support is sought in a promise of our Lord:—‘Knowing most fully that this See of Holy Peter remains ever free from all blemish of error, according to the divine promise of the Lord our Saviour made to the Prince of His disciples, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and, when thou art converted, confirm thy brethren.”’<sup>1</sup> But what was asked in this prayer of Christ was that Peter’s faith in Himself might not fail permanently, as it had temporarily failed in the denial; and it should also be obvious that there is a wide difference between a faith in Christ issuing in perseverance to the end, and a gift of correct knowledge extending to every doctrine and rule which might be embraced in the controversies of the Christian Church. The truth is that the biblical evidence taken alone would never have suggested the theory of the Roman primacy, and of the inerrancy of the supreme Pontiff. The exegetical argument simply represents the best that could be done, with very unpromising material, to give a show of sanction by Christ and His Apostles to an institution which was believed to be indispensable to the Church for the adequate fulfilment of its mission.

(b) Equally unconvincing is the assertion that by consent of the ancient Church, Rome possessed a supreme power of teaching which was included in its inheritance

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 32.

of the primacy. It is true that many of the Fathers attached the utmost weight to the attitude taken by Rome, and to the testimony which it bore, in the doctrinal controversies. 'With Rome,' says Irenæus, 'every Church ought to agree.'<sup>1</sup> 'Roma locuta, causa finita est,' is a comment of Augustine on the result of a reference to the Bishop of Rome.<sup>2</sup> When, however, the whole evidence from the patristic Church is taken into account, it only justifies us in saying that in the view of the Fathers and other Churches Rome was usually right; and this falls considerably short of the position that Rome was always right, and still further does it fall short of the position that Rome must always be right. Had the last position been claimed and admitted, the argument 'Roma locuta est' must have bulked far more largely than it actually did in the doctrinal controversies, and must ever have been cited as the decisive consideration. 'Instead of the bitter and destructive conflicts with actual or reputed heretics,' says Hase, 'against whom books were written and synods were summoned, all well-disposed persons would have had recourse to the infallible utterance of the Pope, and the oracle at Rome would have been interrogated more than was of old the oracle at Delphi.'<sup>3</sup>

(c) The claim of papal infallibility invites two further tests. Have the papal decrees always been in accordance with truth, and have they always been consistent one with another? As regards the first test, it is held on good grounds by Protestants that doctrines which

<sup>1</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 2. The reason given is 'propter potiore principality.''

<sup>2</sup> *Sermo*, 131. A doctrinal case had been referred to Rome, and such was the comment on receipt of the verdict. But a final court of appeal is not necessarily thought to be identical with an infallible tribunal.

<sup>3</sup> Hase, *Handbuch der Protestantischen Polemik*, 5<sup>te</sup> Auf. 1890, p. 195.

are promulgated on papal authority go beyond the evidence, or against the evidence, which is supplied in our most authentic source for the knowledge of the Christian revelation. But it would appear that it would be decisive of the question, and would render superfluous the elaborate argument that arises under the former head, if it could be shown that a single Pope had grievously erred from what others have approved as revealed doctrine. There seems no doubt that this was so in the case of Honorius I., who in writing sanctioned the heretical doctrine of Monotheletism, was condemned for heresy by the œcumenical Council of 681, and was repudiated by his successor Leo II. as having attempted 'to subvert the immaculate faith.'<sup>1</sup> The papal claim was also seriously compromised by Sixtus V., who prepared an edition of the Vulgate which has put the scholarship of his Church to the blush.

### III

The affirmation of the papal supremacy and infallibility seems to have been a natural, consistent and even inevitable development of the Roman Catholic system. The Church was right in its instinct that an individual head was better suited to the purpose of giving effect to its mission than the œcumenical Council of bishops. It is a consideration of some practical importance that the episcopal machinery is unwieldy, cumbrous and tardy, and that the individual head can act promptly, easily and decisively. The Papacy, further, affords a better guarantee for the maintenance of the visible unity of the Church, since in all bodies charged with duties of government there is a tendency

<sup>1</sup> Hase, *ibid.*, pp. 196-7.



to form parties or factions, and thus to propagate a spirit of disunion among the governed. In particular there are very manifest objections to the œcumenical Council from the point of view of a Church which claims to be the infallible teacher of revealed truth, and which demands uniformity of belief in regard to every doctrine which it propounds as revealed. For it is, to say the least, extremely unedifying that the representatives of the Church should engage in disputes as to the truth of a doctrine which may be destined ultimately to be promulgated as an original and integral element of the Christian revelation; and while this consequence could be partially averted, as at the Vatican Council, by holding the sessions in private, the possibility of scandal is more effectually avoided when the debate is conducted in the privacy of a single mind, and when the only voice that reaches the world is that by which, without note of doubt or hesitancy, the final decision is announced. It has also been pointed out that the dogma of papal infallibility gives to the Church an object of veneration similar to that which in the Mass makes a powerful appeal to the popular mind and heart. The miracle of the bread and wine that have been changed into the body and blood of the Lord has its impressive counterpart in the miracle of the human being who has been advanced to participation in the omniscience of God.

Apart from the relative justification of the Papacy as viewed in the context of Roman Catholicism, it is founded upon certain principles which are capable of being defended as at least a contribution to the ideal ecclesiastical constitution. It founds on the undoubted fact that the leadership which is most inspiring and successful is that, not of a select council



or committee, but of the elect individual; and in its own way it seeks to find the great and saintly man, and when it finds him, it seeks to strengthen his hands by investing him with the fullest possible endowment of official authority. Every branch of the Church lives, not only by the means of grace, but by leadership; and it may well be thought a weakness of the Presbyterian and Congregational types of polity that to the greatest of leaders they only accord temporary and qualified recognition, and insist on them making way, at least in the posts that carry with them greatest ecclesiastical authority, for others who may be far inferior in point of capacity and service. The general idea that the Church, universal or particular, should take the necessary steps to find its great man, and that when it finds him, it can hardly trust him too much, or give him too free a hand, could certainly be adapted to the improvement of other forms of ecclesiastical constitution. If in every generation it were possible for the Church of Rome to discover and utilise its greatest man—representing the highest combination of intellect, of piety, and of devotion to the welfare of mankind, it would possess an instrument that made an appeal such as is rarely made to the imagination and the hearts of millions of human beings, and exercised a unique influence on Christian thinking and on missionary and philanthropic enterprises, and it would go far to solve a permanent problem of the Church—viz. how to combine with the principle of historic continuity of faith and life a powerful principle of movement and progress. But the concrete embodiment of this fair idea in the institution of the Papacy falls far short of the promise, and indeed breaks the promise. The great man of the generation, it seems, must now be an Italian. He must also be old. He

must commend himself as a safe ecclesiastic to the College of Cardinals. And in proportion as the efforts to find him have been restricted, the claims made for him have been magnified until they have become utterly intolerable and incredible. As if mere leadership were not privilege enough for the greatest, there is asserted for him a despotic authority over the Church and its members. And while he may be unequal even to the tasks of initiative, he claims to be believed as if his voice were the voice of God, and seeks to silence opposition and counter-argument by an anathema.

It is evidence of the dauntless courage of the Roman Church that the development of the institution of the Papacy has brought it into collision with three of the strongest of the forces of the modern world, and that it has not shrunk from the consequences. The powerful forces which it affronts are nationality, democracy and intellectual freedom. Catholics love their race and country no less than other men, but all save those of Italy must be content to see the strongest and saintliest of their nation denied the right to aspire to the chair of God's Vicar on earth. The spirit of democracy is flouted by the ecclesiastical constitution which vests the election of the Pope in an oligarchy, and elevates him to the rank of a spiritual autocrat. To the national spirit it is probable that concessions will be made in the future; but it is not probable that Rome will ever so far yield to the spirit of democracy as to arrange the election of a Pope on the same basis as the election of the president of a republic, and to limit his tenure of office to a term of years, or to the period of his intellectual and spiritual prime. But the crowning act of daring was the decree of papal infallibility. It seems amazing that in an age when absolute freedom



of thought is exercised, and the world is full of controversy in regard to every capital question of being, well-being and duty, this great world-wide organisation, which is a rich home of culture, and which is aware of all that has happened in the realms of science, philosophy and criticism, should claim that there is one man living who, when purposing to instruct on questions of faith and duty, is taken out of the category of humanity, and is enabled to speak the last word in the certification of truth and the condemnation of error. That it was impolitic to have issued such a defiance to the liberal spirit of the age is not so clear. There is evidence that when doubt and uncertainty are minded to believe they are most powerfully attracted by a system which shows no trace of the spirit of doubt, and no fear even of the impossible or the absurd; and it is therefore conceivable that the dogma may be of service to Rome in the visible reaction which may be expected to develop still further among those outside the pale of Christian faith who have realised the burden of a wavering judgment and the nausea of a gospel of negations. But if the dogma holds out some prospect of advantage in the appeal to the 'credulity of unbelief,' it incurs the risk of more serious loss by violating the intellectual conscience of many whose affections Rome might otherwise secure. It is the claim of the Church of Rome that it is founded upon a rock in the primacy of Peter, but there is now, as Hase says, another rock—'even the rock of offence of the Vatican Council on which the boat of the fisherman is in danger of being wrecked.'<sup>1</sup>

The Roman Church claims infallibility for itself, and in particular for the Supreme Pontiff, because it is convinced that the ecclesiastical and theological system for

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 240.

which they stand sponsor has the quality of a gospel, and is an unequalled engine for the religious and moral training of the race. It is the peculiar Christian system which it administers, and not argument in the support of tradition and the Papacy, which is the ultimate ground of its assurance and of its self-confidence. The theories of an oral tradition and of papal infallibility, while designed to create assurance of the truth of the system, are really less credible than the general religious scheme which they are supposed to guarantee. The reason why Protestant polemics against the Roman Catholic theory of the Rule of Faith have proved comparatively barren of results is that Roman Catholics have better reasons for believing in their religion as a whole than are supplied in the figment of an oral tradition and of an infallible Pope, and that these reasons are largely left untouched by the destructive Protestant criticism of the standard. The hold of Roman Catholicism upon the world is due to the fact that it is a version of the Christian Gospel which certain nations and individuals have found to be suited to their spiritual needs, and so long as they have this experience they will believe that the polemics, however plausible, contain some fundamental error or fallacy. The only attack which has made any impression on Romanism is that which has opposed to its conception of Christianity a purer and stronger version of the same Gospel in a more satisfactory setting. The question is thus shifted to the merits of Roman Catholicism as an interpretation of the Christian religion.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PROTESTANT THEORY

THERE has been much discussion of the principles of Protestantism, and in particular there is much dispute as to the authentic Protestant attitude towards the problem of authority. The conservative view of the Protestant norm of doctrine is expressed in the uncompromising formula that 'the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is the religion of the Protestants.'<sup>1</sup> According to the radical view its principle is to be defined as the right of private judgment involving emancipation from all authority. 'The Reformation,' says Schwegler, 'was in its principle and genuine consequence a rupture of thought with authority. The reduction of religion to its simplest elements, which it began, must of necessity be continued further, and be closed only with the ultimate, original, supra-historical elements—that is, with reason, reason that knows itself the source of all philosophy as of all religion.'<sup>2</sup> But the first of these definitions errs by excess, the second by defect. The Reformers proclaimed the Scriptures to be the supreme standard, yet the authority which they practically acknowledged was not that of the whole Bible, but the authority of the Bible as a whole interpreted from its

<sup>1</sup> This is attributed to Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*, 1638. His words are: 'The Bible, I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants. Propose me anything out of this book, I will subscribe it with hand and heart.'

<sup>2</sup> *History of Philosophy*, E. Tr., pp. 148-9.

centre. Again, it was undoubtedly owing to the fact of men taking courage to exercise their private judgment and to follow the dictates of enlightened reason that the Churches of the Reformation came into existence, and that a precedent was set for the untrammelled work of the modern mind in philosophy and science. But to identify the principle of historic Protestantism with free thought is an illegitimate abstraction. To do justice to the concrete reality of the movement it is necessary to take note, not only of the liberty of judgment which was asserted in the revolt against the Roman system, but also of the use which was made of the recovered liberty, and of the general type of religious doctrine which was won by the new method. The use to which the liberty was put was, not to repudiate the notion of authority in religion altogether, but to transfer the allegiance from an ecclesiastical authority that was distrusted to a Scriptural authority that was believed to rest on a solid basis. The general result was that the Scriptures, as the true religious authority, were declared to yield as their central content the gospel of a gracious justification of sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Protestant theory rested on the same general presuppositions which underlie the Roman Catholic scheme—that the general revelation in nature and the constitution of man has been supplemented by a special revelation in Christ, that the work of Christ is the ground of our salvation, and that the necessary provision was made for preserving and guaranteeing a knowledge of the divine and saving truths of the Gospel. The special feature of the Protestant theory is the conception that the sole provision made for the (transmission) of revelation is the written Word of God; and that it is a perfect instrument, requiring

no addition to its contents from an alleged tradition, and requiring no standard for its interpretation, whether in a traditional norm of doctrine, or in the pronouncements of a pretended infallible Church. In addition to the affirmation of the perfections of Scripture, the scheme includes an account of the basis of the authority of Scripture, a proof of its authority, and a theory of Scriptural interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

## I

The perfections of Scripture, as affirmed by Protestantism, included the four notes of authority, sufficiency, perspicuity and efficacy. Each of these notes had a very definite polemical point. The authority of Scripture was conceived as exclusive, in contrast to the limited authority which was allowed it in the Roman system.<sup>2</sup> In opposition to the Roman view that Scripture is an incomplete record of revelation, it was maintained that it has the note of sufficiency. It was not asserted that it has recorded all the sayings of Christ and His Apostles. Nor was it asserted that it sets forth explicitly every assured theological truth, and every salutary ordinance connected with worship and discipline. It was recognised that there is a legitimate and necessary work to be done in reasoning inferentially from the data of revelation, and in applying its principles in detail to the religious and moral sphere. The sense in which it was declared sufficient

<sup>1</sup> In App. F the relative sections of the *Westminster Confession* are printed as the most masterly and comprehensive compendium of the heads of the general Protestant doctrine. Illustrative passages from other sources are conveniently given in Winer, *Confessions of Christendom*, E. Tr., 1861.

<sup>2</sup> 'Verbum Dei condit articulos fidei, praeterea nemo ne angelus quidem.'—*Art. Smalk.* Cf. also *Formula Concordiae*, praef. i. iii.; *Theses Bernenses*, i. ii.; *Conf. Helv. Prior*, i.; *Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii. 4. For the Protestant Confessions use is made of Schaff, *op. cit.*, vol. iii.



was that it contains and makes known all that is necessary to salvation 'In sacred Scripture,' to quote a typical statement, 'the universal Church has a most full exposition of whatsoever pertains both to saving faith, and to the right moulding of the life which is pleasing to God.'<sup>1</sup> In opposition to the view that Scripture is an obscure record, which calls for a clearer commentary in tradition, and also for an infallible interpreter, it was maintained that it has the note of perspicuity. It was granted that its meaning is hidden from unregenerate men, and that even to spiritual men different passages of Scripture shine with varying degrees of brightness, while some may seem altogether dark. But it was held that it is clear as the sun in the general tenor of its teaching as to the scheme of salvation, and that the difficult passages can be understood by the help of those which are plain and easy. In virtue of its perspicuity, Scripture was declared to be its own interpreter.<sup>2</sup> It was of course held that the Church has the power and the duty of defining doctrine, and of judging controversies of faith, and that the organised Christian Society is bound to exact from its members respect for its decisions. But Protestantism was quite clear on the general principle that a Church may not claim inerrancy for creed or confession on the ground of any inherent infallibility, and that the ultimate criterion of the truth of its doctrinal determinations must be their conformity or disconformity with the Word of God. Once more, in opposition to Roman practice, which withheld the

<sup>1</sup> *Conf. Helv. Post.*, i. 2; *Conf. Scot.*, xix.; xxxix. art. vi. Many of the Fathers had previously stated the principle as forcibly, e.g. Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum*, ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Conf. Helv. Prior*, ii.; *Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii.; *Irish Articles*, i. 5.

Scriptures from the laity, Protestantism affirmed the efficacy of Scripture in the sense that Bible-reading is a chief means of grace, and in accordance with this principle it promoted the circulation of the Bible in the common tongue.<sup>1</sup>

In the issue as between Scripture and an ecclesiastically managed tradition, Protestantism was emphatically in the right. Scripture is our one authentic and trustworthy source for the knowledge of the revelation of God in Christ; and the Reformers had the best of grounds for refusing to admit the co-ordinate, not to say superior authority, of an alleged apostolic tradition whose original scope was unknown, which had been exposed to the changing influences of centuries, and which in later periods had not been too honestly administered. It was also a claim which could be made on good grounds and with honest conviction, that the sacred volume, besides being authoritative, was sufficient, clear, and a most effectual means of grace. At the same time qualifications and explanations were attached to the statement of these perfections, which made it appear that the object of the affirmations was not so much the library of Scripture as the system of saving truth which is contained in Scripture. When we speak of the volume we must accompany each proposition with a reservation: it is authoritative, but only within a certain range; sufficient, but only for light upon the way of salvation; perspicuous, but in many parts obscure; efficacious, but in some passages unilluminating and even unedifying. But to the central and culminating message of Scripture, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the notes belong without qualification. The stamp of authority is upon the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Irish Articles*, i. 4.

message of the gospel as a whole, and upon its constituent articles. It is sufficient in that it deals adequately and effectively with the whole problem of life and destiny, of sin and salvation, with which it professes to cope. It is so perspicuous that the experience which follows its entrance into the mind, and its apprehension by faith, has the acknowledged character of an illumination. It is efficacious, for it is above all an evangelical message extracted from the Scriptures, and embodied in preaching and in life, which is the persistently and powerfully operative means of grace.

## II

The basis of the authority of Scripture was declared to be the authority of God, from whom Scripture has proceeded. The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church was supposed to mean that it is the authority of the Church which gives it the value of the Word of God, and the position was energetically maintained that it derives its authority from God alone.<sup>1</sup> At bottom, Roman Catholic theology doubtless occupied the same position, since it equally holds that God is the author of Scripture; and with this presupposition it cannot be possible for the Church to invest it with divine authority, or to do more than declare its divine origin, and also help to make such origin credible. The Roman Catholics were wrong in the contention that we have no sufficient ground for holding, apart from the testimony of the Church, that the Bible is the Word

<sup>1</sup> 'We affirm that such as allege the Scripture to have no other authority but that which it has received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk, which always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor.'—*Conf. Scot.*, art. xix.



of God; but it was unjust to make them responsible for the position that a human judgment and decree could make that to become the Word of God which had not previously been the Word of God.

The Protestant doctrine of Scripture, stated in its most general terms, is 'that the canonical Scriptures of the holy Prophets and Apostles of both Testaments are the very and true Word of God.'<sup>1</sup> This doctrine includes two vital positions, that in a unique sense Scripture has proceeded from God as its author, and that the result of the divine agency was to create an instrument which is sufficient and reliable for the function which it was intended to discharge. Obviously, however, there is room for a considerable difference of opinion within the limits that are fixed by these principles. There are degrees in authorship. It usually involves direct responsibility for every idea and word; but authorship may also be affirmed of one who entrusts to another the task of putting his thoughts and plans in writing, and it may even be extended to include the work of editorial supervision. Similarly there is often room for discussion as to how much precisely was embraced in the settled purpose of the author of a great book. These possibilities of variation are reflected in the different theories of inspiration, which are concerned mainly with three topics—the mode of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human subject; the nature and extent of the illumination received; and the range within which inspiration is to be supposed to have made of Scripture an absolutely trustworthy instrument.

1. The belief that Scripture has God for its author was early associated, and very naturally associated, with

<sup>1</sup> *Conf. Helv. Prior*, i.

a theory of inspiration which attributed to God in the fullest extent all that is implied in the idea of authorship. This theory is described as mechanical, in that it was supposed that the Holy Spirit completely controlled the action of the inspired subject, and employed him as a mere penman; and it was described as plenary in that the divine communication was believed to have included the impulse to write, the suggestion of the matter, and also the suggestion of the words. The consequence which these definitions carried with them was the absolute inerrancy of Scripture on all points on which it was its design to teach,—historical, geographical and chronological, as well as doctrinal and ethical. In this elaborated and rigid form the theory is characteristic of the scholastic theology of the seventeenth century rather than of the Reformation era<sup>1</sup>; and it may be evidence of unwillingness even at the later period to impose it as an article of faith that the *Westminster Confession* does not include a theory of the nature and range of inspiration in its powerful handling of the topic of Holy Scripture. It is also, of course, a possible explanation of the reticence of the *Westminster Confession* that it was taken for granted that, where the divine authorship was assumed, no theory could be even considered save that which conceived the divine agency as accomplishing everything, and as ensuring inerrancy upon every point which is deliberately handled. That Calvin looked upon Scripture as a statute-book of doctrine and morality, and that he held the mechanical and plenary theory of inspiration, is antecedently probable from

<sup>1</sup> Turretin, *Theologia Elenctica*, and more recently, Gaussen, *Theopneusty*, or the *Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, E. Tr., 1842. There is a vigorous defence of the position by Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Introd. ch. ii.

his intellectual constitution and legal training, and this is strongly supported by the terms in which he usually touches on the subject. Luther, however, did not accept the plenary theory as an integral part of the doctrine of the Word of God, but left large scope for the human activity, and even the human judgment, of inspired writers.<sup>1</sup> This theory was adopted in part as the result of *a priori* reasoning as to the necessary method of a divine authorship, in part as a means of strengthening the polemical resources of Protestantism in its conflict with Rome; but it fell to be tested by psychological and historical facts, and it has been found impossible to maintain it in the light of the patient and exhaustive investigation of the Scriptural data which has been conducted by the Protestant Church during the last two centuries.<sup>2</sup> It may indeed be said to be the almost unanimous verdict of modern Protestant theology that Scripture is not the pure product of a divine causality which employed the human agent as a mere instrument, and which guaranteed trustworthy information on every topic which finds a place in Scripture; while there is a growing recognition in Apologetics that well-meant attempts to uphold the theory, though welcome to a certain devout and decisive type of mind, are a real source of weakness, and even of discredit.

2. As to an alternative theory of the mode and range of inspiration there is no general agreement. The usual conception of the relation of the Divine Spirit to the human personality may be described as dynamical. It is held to have quickened and intensified the intellectual and spiritual powers, yet so that the process remained

<sup>1</sup> See App. E, Luther's Doctrine of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Sanday, *The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration*, 1893.



human as well as divine. The nature of the divine gift has been variously conceived—as a supernatural communication of knowledge, or as a general influence of the Spirit which gave the sympathy and insight needed to handle the given historical matter, or merely as a providential supervision which preserved from grave error.

When it is held that inspiration involved the supernatural communication of higher knowledge, the gift has been supposed to consist of the whole matter, as distinguished from the words of Scripture; or of its doctrinal and ethical teaching, though not of historical matter that was remote from doctrinal interests, and of apparent contributions to science; or of certain primary strata of religious and ethical truth, though not of theological reflections or practical applications which exhibit a secondary character. When the conception of a partial inspiration is held, the inerrancy of Scripture is consequentially restricted to the narrower range within which an immediate agency of the Divine Spirit is recognised.

3. The various theories of Inspiration reflect the fact that we are ignorant of the precise mode in which the Divine Spirit operated so as to produce the particular result which was reached in the making of Scripture. As a fact, we cannot hope to analyse the process completely, and especially to disentangle what was due to a divine illumination of the prophetic mind from what was due to the influence of a superintending Providence. But the uncertainty as to the precise mode and range of the divine activity in the making of Scriptures does not subvert the main position which was affirmed in the doctrine of inspiration, viz. that the Bible is a unique gift of God, and in particular that it perfectly serves the purpose for which it was designed

as the trustworthy source of our knowledge of the Christian revelation, and as the sovereign means of grace. The Bible is the Word of God, not because He brought it into being by an unqualified miracle, but because as it stands it is His gift, and is perfectly suited for doing the work to which He designed it in the economy of salvation. It may be added that a demonstration that it contains a human element of ignorance and error can no more prejudice its claim to be the Word of God than a remainder of sin in his character deprives a believer of the title to be called a child of God.

### III

We have next to consider the proof which was offered of the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God. A demand for proof came from two quarters. There were neo-pagans who had learned from the Renaissance to doubt and criticise, and who scoffed at the stupendous claim that the literature of the world included one book which had God for its author. The Roman Catholic also pressed for reasons, supposing that the answer must be that the Bible was accepted on the authority of the Church—in which case a concession was made by Protestantism that seemed to be suicidal.

This twofold challenge was most directly and effectively answered by Calvin.<sup>1</sup> In reply to the sceptic he frankly admits that he knows of no argument which can convince him so long as he is carnal and is possessed of an unspiritual mind. He can adduce arguments that are weighty enough to justify faith in Scripture, but they have not the force of a mathematical

<sup>1</sup> *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, i. 7 ff. But see also App. E, Luther's Doctrine of Scripture.

proof for the mind of the natural man. To the Roman Catholic it could not but be granted that the Canon of Scripture had been formed by the ancient Church, and that it had been taken over from it by Protestantism; but it was contended that transmission of the sacred writings by the hand of the Church by no means implied that the authority of the Church was the ground on which they were received as of divine origin. The grounds on which the Bible was believed to be the Word of God were of different kinds. The prophetic and apostolic writings were genuine, and if genuine they were the medium of a divine message which had been miraculously accredited. In particular the sublimity and efficacy of the contents, and the unity of the whole, were pronounced to be an achievement which transcended the unaided powers of the human mind. But the decisive ground was an inward assurance wrought in the believer by the Holy Spirit that the Scriptures were of God.

‘Whereas they demand, how shall we be persuaded it came from God, unless we have recourse to the decree of the Church? This is all one as if a man should ask, how shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, or sweet from bitter? For the Scripture exhibits no less plain evidence of her truth than white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things of their taste.

‘It is such a persuasion as to require no reasons: such a knowledge as to consist with the highest reason: such a feeling as cannot be engendered but by revelation from heaven.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Institutio*, i. 7. 2. 5; cf. *Conf. Scot.*, xix.; *Conf. Gall.*, ii. It is curious that Martineau should have overlooked the crowning proof and should have supposed that the whole of the Protestant argument was as follows:—‘If the facts are real the doctrines are certain; if the



Two questions arise in regard to this famous proof from the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Is it valid, and if valid, how much does it prove? It founds upon an obvious fact—that believing persons have a feeling that in reading the Bible the book has a unique quality and efficacy. But it may be objected that while feeling vouches for this unique character, just as it vouches for sweetness or light, it conveys no information as to the divine origin of the matter which induces the deep sense of spiritual satisfaction. The argument might perhaps be supplemented as follows. The believer is conscious in his own experience of the occurrence of changes of the most momentous kind, which he knows were not self-caused, and which he confidently interprets as due to the work of the Holy Spirit; and when he becomes conscious in reading the Bible of a power which does the work of sustaining and fostering his spiritual life, he recognises it as belonging to the same spiritual realm, and he applies the same explanation of a divine origin. If it be objected that even in the prior case ‘we can have no reliable information as to whether the experience is due to a natural or supernatural cause,’<sup>1</sup> it may fairly be replied that weak and sinful men who are conscious of having undergone a spiritual revolution are entitled to the opinion that it was not of their own doing, or due to any influence which is of the same kind with their own finite endeavours.

But what, we proceed to ask, is it which the believer, assisted by the inward witness, knows to be of divine origin? According to Calvin, he knows that the Scriptures have proceeded from God. But it seems books are authentic, the facts are real; that the books are authentic, adequate testimony proves.’—*The Seat of Authority in Religion*, 1890, p. 175.

<sup>1</sup> Höffding, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 102.

clear on reflection that such testimony is borne only to particular portions of Scripture, or to a particular content of Scripture, and not to every passage and to every portion of its message. The contention that it bears witness to the divine origin of every part rests upon the assumption that Scripture is a single work, and that if the hand and mind of God are discernible in anything, they must be supposed to have given us everything which it contains. But the kind of unity assumed in Scripture by Calvin and his followers is a dogmatic assumption which has been disposed of by the patient science of biblical theology. There is a unity of Scripture, in respect that it mirrors a course of religious education which advanced to the culmination of revelation in Christ, and the founding of the absolute and final religion; but there is no single system of theology and morality underlying every type of biblical theology such as justifies the derivation of every part from the thinking of a single mind, and that the divine mind; and still less is there a uniformity of literary characteristics which supports the assumption of a single authorship. There is incontestably in the Bible a divine quality which is as definite and distinguishable as the quality of genius that we discover in the greatest literature; but there is the further parallel that in both cases the higher element interpenetrates and co-operates with types of thought that have a humbler source and move on a lower plane.

The proof from the inward witness of the Spirit justifies belief in the divine quality and efficacy of a message touching God and salvation which reaches us through the medium of the Scriptures. Though it does not vouch for the divine quality of all that is contained in Scripture, or for the divine origin of the

separate books, it undoubtedly lays the foundation of a conception of Scripture which conserves the lofty dignity that has been assigned to it in the Protestant tradition. For, if it be true, as it unquestionably is true, that we are dependent on it for the transmission to us of the knowledge of the Gospel, and that it has fulfilled its function of transmitting a record and interpretation of revelation which is a sufficient provision for our spiritual needs, it takes a very high place among the objects of Christian faith as a necessary instrument in the Christian economy.

#### IV

The Protestant theory of the Rule of Faith also includes a statement of the principles governing the interpretation of Scripture. The work described as interpretation included two different branches of theological labour, one of which was exemplified by the commentaries of Luther and Calvin, the other by Melancthon's *Loci* and Calvin's *Institutio Religionis Christianae*. What was primarily meant by interpretation was the continuous and detailed work upon the original text which was carried out in the form of translation, exegetical comment and paraphrase. But the name was also capable of embracing the larger task in which the particular doctrines of Scripture were expounded with the help of all relevant passages and texts, were located in their due perspective, and were organised into a consistent whole. This latter task, it is now seen, resolves itself into two—the construction of a system of Biblical Theology as a purely historical discipline, and the elaboration of a system of Dogmatic Theology, on the basis of Scripture, as a



scheme of absolute religious truth. But this distinction was not present to the minds of Melancthon or Calvin, who regarded their doctrinal systems as also furnishing a most faithful exposition of biblical theology.

1. The work of interpretation, alike in its lower and its higher form, was subjected to a code of negative and positive rules. Negatively it was laid down that Scripture must not be expounded so as to wrest it into conformity with an ecclesiastical or traditional standard that was unable to justify itself as wholly Scriptural in origin. The function of the Church in its Councils was to be a witness to God's Word, and 'not to make that the true interpretation of the same which was not before by His holy will expressed in His Word.'<sup>1</sup> The rule was rejected which declared the meaning of Scripture to be settled by a unanimous consent of the Fathers, and the duty was asserted of treating the patristic writings critically as well as reverentially. The work of interpretation was further simplified by throwing over the principle that Scripture has a manifold sense, including the allegorical—a principle which had introduced much confusion into theology, and has done more than anything else to lower the credit of the Fathers with the sane modern mind. The positive side of the theory was expressed generally in the affirmation that Scripture is perspicuous, and that it is its own sufficient interpreter. The detailed rules relative to this point were in the main three. It was premised that those essaying the work should be spiritual men.<sup>2</sup> In the second place stress was laid upon the necessity of using all available linguistic and

<sup>1</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. xx. ; cf. *Formula Concordiae*, preface.

<sup>2</sup> *Ita iudiciis nonnisi spiritualium hominum, ex verbo petitis, acquiescimus.*—*Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii. 4.

historical aids with a view to discover the original and genuine meaning of the sacred writers.<sup>1</sup> And finally, it was prescribed that respect should be had to the analogy of the faith, and that the results of interpretation should conform as a whole and in detail to a certain scheme of faith and morals which stood out unmistakably in Scripture as the central and guaranteed stratum of revelation. The references to this doctrinal norm of Scriptural interpretation are of great importance. 'The orthodox and genuine interpretation of Scripture,' according to the *Second Helvetic Confession*, 'agrees with the rule of faith and charity, and makes pre-eminently for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.'<sup>2</sup> In the *Formula Concordiae* reference is made to a content of Scripture which is described as 'the Catholic Christian faith,' and which stands out as revealed truth with unchallengeable certainty.<sup>3</sup> The *Westminster Confession* does not give the same prominence as others of the group to this standard, yet refers incidentally to the 'known principles of Christianity.'<sup>4</sup> The doctrinal norm of interpretation thus indicated was primarily the doctrine of justification by faith. In the language of Luther, Scripture must preach Christ—*i.e.* the doctrine of justification through faith in the merits of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in the Zwinglian Articles we read:—

'The sum of the Gospel is that our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has made known to us the

<sup>1</sup> 'Illam duntaxat Scripturarum interpretationem pro orthodoxa et genuina agnoscimus, quae ex ipsis est petita Scripturis (ex ingenio utique ejus linguae, in qua sunt scriptae, secundum circumstantias item expensae, et pro ratione locorum vel similium vel dissimilium, plurium quoque et clariorum expositae),' etc.—*Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Praef., ii.

<sup>4</sup> Cap. xx. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See App. E.

will of the Heavenly Father, and by His innocence has redeemed us from death and reconciled us to God.'<sup>1</sup>

The doctrinal norm of interpretation was also generally held to include the Catholic dogmas of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ. It was indeed made absolutely clear that these dogmas were treated as normative, not because of ecclesiastical authority, but because they shone forth clearly from Scripture, and because the witness which the ancient Church had borne to them was thus known to be true.<sup>2</sup>

2. (a) We have next to consider the application of those principles to the two branches of interpretation which have been distinguished. As applied to the detailed interpretation of Scripture they constituted a real advance in scientific exegesis accompanied by an equally unscientific limitation. It was an enormous gain to have thrown over the theory of a manifold sense of Scripture. The requirement of a mind attuned to sympathy with the spiritual content of Scripture was entirely justified. The determination to go behind patristic authority, and to labour afresh at the sources with the apparatus of modern scholarship, marked the beginning of a new and fruitful era in biblical science. But the work in the exegetical field was so far marred by the re-affirmation of the dogmatic principle of interpretation. There is a sense in which it is the duty of the exegete to use clear passages to elucidate those which are obscure, but it is not lawful

<sup>1</sup> Art. ii. Cf. *Conf. Helv. Prior*, v. ; *ibid.*, *Post.*, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Loyalty to the dogmas in question as revealed truth, and to the Creeds as faithful witnesses thereto, is professed in *Conf. Augs.*, i. ; *Formula Concordiae*, praef. ii. ; *Helv. Post.*, iii. 11 ; xxxix. art. viii. ; *Irish Articles*, i. The *Westminster Confession*, which otherwise follows the *Irish Articles* closely, omits all reference to the Creeds, but this was doubtless because it feared even to seem to lean on human authority. It had certainly no criticism to make on the Catholic dogmas.



to use the clear to read into the obscure what it does not contain with a view to extract from it an orthodox and edifying meaning. This accommodation was widely practised—chiefly with the object of making Scripture witness in all its parts to the divinity and the atoning work of Christ, and to the gospel of justification by faith. Almost alone Luther did not feel this to be necessary; and he was willing to grant that prophets and apostles sometimes built with wood, hay and stubble, as well as gold, and to place James below Paul instead of trying to harmonise them. We now know that Luther's point of view was the sounder. It is wiser as well as more honest to interpret Scripture according to its original sense, and to admit that it does not contain in all its parts the catholic and evangelical system of faith and morals, than to assume that doctrinally it is all of a piece, and to try to make this good by the shifts of a dogmatic exegesis.

(b) In the higher branch of interpretation, which was concerned with the systematic exposition of doctrine, it is quite clear that the Reformers operated with a particular content of Scripture as regulative, if not of the meaning, at least of the value, of the rest of the biblical material. It was so with Luther, who frankly refers us to the Pauline Epistles, the Fourth Gospel and 1 Peter for the norm of the doctrines of revelation. The actual procedure of Calvin did not differ in principle from that of Luther, since he operated with a scheme of thought in which he combined the doctrines of grace and of predestination which he found in St. Paul, while he merely utilised as much of the remaining material as could be usefully worked into this doctrinal framework. In Dogmatics this procedure is not only legitimate but necessary; and the

only criticism that can be made on the old Protestant theology is that it professed to be objectively reproducing the whole content of Scripture, when it was actually editing Scripture in the light of an assured central content of Scripture. There can be no question that it acted legitimately in extracting from Scripture a group of fundamental doctrines and principles, and in using these as the regulative principle of the manifold and heterogeneous elements of Scripture, and as the criterion of their value; and the only disputable point is whether it correctly divined the substance of revelation in elevating the gospel of justification by faith to the rank of a doctrinal norm, and in representing the Catholic dogmas of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ as inseparable and inalienable elements of the Gospel. This is one of the cardinal issues in modern theology, and to it we shall have to return in the discussion of the doctrinal substance of the Christian religion.

It is beyond dispute that the fundamental conviction of the Reformers was that the Gospel is true which was preached by Christ, and more fully unfolded by His apostle Paul. It was not so much that they accepted the Gospel because they knew the Bible to be the Word of God, as that they claimed all perfection for the Bible because through it they had come into possession of the vivifying gospel of the grace of God.<sup>1</sup> And it may well seem to be the duty of theology to concentrate upon this impregnable part of their position—viz. that there is in Scripture a divine message which is self-authenticating to those who meet it with

<sup>1</sup> 'Sancta Christiana Ecclesia, cujus unicum caput est Christus, nata est ex Verbo Dei, in eoque permanet, nec vocem audit alieni.'—*Theses Bernenses*, i.

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a trustful mind and an obedient will. The crisis of Protestantism consists, not so much in the discredit of the old theory of mechanical and plenary inspiration, with its disturbing consequences for the doctrine of absolute inerrancy, as in differences of opinion touching the essential content of the message of the Christian revelation. If the content be truly expounded, it will continue as before to take captive the minds and hearts of men; and when this occurs there never fails the reproduction of its due reverence for the Bible as the book which enshrines and transmits the gracious and life-giving message, and it continues to be fitly described, in contrast to all other books, as the Word of God.



## CHAPTER III

### THE SCHOOL OF THE SPIRIT

It could be said with some reason that Protestantism did not correctly describe its principle of knowledge when it declared the Scriptures to be the source and standard of doctrine. Was not the sovereign authority which it recognised, and to which it bowed, the Holy Spirit? The teaching of the prophets, it was held, had been given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost; the doctrine of the New Testament was derived either directly from Christ, or from the Spirit whom He promised to the disciples to lead them into all the truth. This initial work was believed to have been continued in an inward witness of the Spirit by which an assurance was conveyed that the Scriptures had the character of the Word of God. It was also taught that the assistance of the Holy Spirit was necessary to make the Word efficacious as a means of grace, and to apply to the darkened and sinful soul the enlightening and life-giving energies that made all things new. Why, then, it was natural to ask, should this principle not be frankly acknowledged, instead of veiling its sovereignty by allusions to another supreme standard? <sup>1</sup> And why

<sup>1</sup> 'The Holy Scriptures I esteem above human treasures, but not so highly as the Word of God, which is living, powerful, and eternal, and pure from the elements of this world, since it is God Himself, Spirit and not letter, written without pen and paper, so that it can never be blotted out.'—Denck, quoted by Jones, *Mystical Religion*, 1910, p. 386.

should it not be more fully trusted? If the Spirit could be believed when it vouched for the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, it seemed that it was equally deserving of credence when it vouched as confidently for other convictions that were rooted in or accompanied a regenerate experience. The Spirit of God bloweth as it listeth, and it was not evident why it should be held to have been debarred from continuing to lay hold of and speak through human instruments even as these had been owned and used in the earlier periods of sacred history.

The School of the Spirit is a comprehensive rubric, which might be held to include wide varieties of standpoint—ranging from religious mania to theological liberalism and unchartered freedom of thought, and also including varied types of mysticism.<sup>1</sup> For our present purpose it is desirable to restrict it to those schools and sects which, believing that special revelation is a mode of the divine activity, have held that throughout the Christian dispensation private revelations of a supernatural kind have continued to be given to men, and that the communications thus made take their place alongside of the Scriptures as authoritative Word of God.

This modification of the Protestant principle was so plausible that it must have been propounded in the natural course of reflection, while it could reckon on peculiar sympathy from minds that had been unsettled and excited in the great spiritual upheaval of the Reformation era. The school had its prototype in the

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan regarded it as the distinctive note of mysticism, that it 'mistook for a divine manifestation the operations of a merely human faculty.' But the 'mystic is not, as such, a visionary, nor has he any interest in appealing to a faculty above reason.'—Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, 1899, p. 19.

patristic church in Montanism, which made the same claim to special illumination, and paid the same penalty in ferocious persecution. Its chief representatives were the Anabaptists, who were vehemently repudiated by Luther and Calvin as seeking to degrade the Word of God to the level of their own vain imaginations, and also as giving a pretext to the civil magistrate, by their visionary projects and their turbulence, for opposing the Reformation as a menace to social order and good morals. The principle of the inner light was largely dissociated at a later date from the communions which are identified by their rejection of infant baptism; but it was re-affirmed by the Society of Friends, it passed over to Swedenborgianism, Irvingism, and other modern sects, and it has at least some affinity with the principle which underlies the work of the subjective schools of modern theology.

## I

The distinctive position of the School of the Spirit, it has been said, is that private revelations have continued to be given to individuals which are no less authoritative than those recorded in Scripture. But there has been much diversity of opinion upon certain subsidiary points—viz. (i.) as to the persons to whom these communications have been vouchsafed; (ii.) as to the mode of their conveyance; and (iii.) as to the precise relation in which the revelations stand to the canonical Scriptures.

i. It has been common in the school to magnify the revelation which is made inwardly to man as man. The knowledge of God and of duty which can be widely reckoned on in all civilised societies was interpreted, not as a result of reasoning, or of the intuitive powers of the mind, but as a gift of the



illuminating Spirit of God. There was also a disposition to exaggerate the extent and value of this general gift in opposition to the orthodox view that the Fall had reduced man to utter spiritual impotence and blindness. The Anabaptists were wont to emphasise the truth that there is a light which 'lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,' and that the soul naturally bears testimony to the righteousness and the love of God. These religious and moral intuitions make up a considerable part of the revelations which Barclay seeks to vindicate in his *Apology*. There was recognised in addition a richer and more spiritual endowment which is bestowed upon the Christian society and its members. The Christian congregation, in the view of the Friends, is the object of a peculiar care and bounty of the Spirit, which gives liberally of illumination and utterance to the worshippers; and the services of an educated ministry are regarded as at the best a makeshift for tiding over the intervals of divine quiescence and silence. By the same Spirit, assistance is also given to believers in dealing with the problems of the intellectual life and the perplexities of the practical life. In other types of thought the tendency has been to minimise or even surrender the claim of average persons to immediate illumination, and to assert it only in the case of certain individuals marked out by extraordinary gifts. These might be conceived to form a fairly large class of persons who, on the ground of exceptional sanctity and spiritual power, were supposed to have received a special mission and unction from on high. The Montanist prophets and their successors of Zwickau were condemned as false prophets; but when the Church has been thoroughly satisfied with a prophetic message it has often been entirely willing to

believe that the saintly, fervent and soul-compelling preacher possessed a real measure of miraculous endowment. During the first hundred years of its history the Church accorded to its inspired prophets far greater reverence than it paid to the more sober and prosaic official who was destined to evolve into a diocesan bishop; and popular Protestantism has also occasionally possessed prophetic preachers whom it has honoured with a similar judgment. In some sects and schools the main emphasis has been laid on the work of a single individual of the prophetic type who was believed to have been raised up as a special instrument, furnished with a momentous message, and commissioned to reform the Church or to perfect its doctrine.

ii. There is also considerable difference of experience and of theory as to the manner of the divine revelations. The main distinction is between the type of experience in which the normal conditions of the intellectual life are suspended and supplemented, and that in which the higher illumination is blended with the ordinary processes of thought and will. There is a natural tendency to regard abnormal psychical conditions as the most reliable criterion of the influence of the Divine Spirit upon the finite spirit. In the early history of Israel, it was ecstasy and trance that were the credentials of the prophet; in the Corinthian Church this kind of gift was coveted more than the excellent way of charity; and it is to Montanism that we owe the most thorough-going conception of inspiration as a mechanical process. It is pathetic to read that Edward Irving would pause in the midst of a sublime discourse, in which genius met with holiness, and would keep reverent silence while some ecstatic brother or sister

interrupted the preacher with contributions in an unknown and unknowable tongue. Outward voices, appearances, and dreams are specified by Barclay as trustworthy media. In many cases the revelation is declared to have been received through the agency of other finite spirits, whether angels or fellow-mortals, who have passed into the unseen world. At this point the type of thought runs into spiritualism, and derives from it such support or discredit as may be thought to follow from the alliance. On the other hand it would appear that what was founded on by many of those who affirmed the reality of private revelations was that they had acquired convictions on religious and moral questions which could not be shaken by argument, and that they had formed holy resolutions from which they could not be moved, either by the allurements or by the terrors of the world. It must be this class of experiences, and not voices, visions and the like, that is the basis of the faith of the great multitude of those who have affirmed the fact of private revelations.

iii. As regards the matter of the alleged revelations, a distinction may be drawn according as they have been supposed to be an independent reproduction of biblical doctrines, a supplement to the knowledge conveyed in the Christian revelation, or a revision and amendment of the doctrinal system of Christianity.

In the teaching of the Anabaptists expression was often given to the idea that the private revelations were a republication of the substance of Scripture. They might even advance to the position that the revelations sufficed for salvation, and that Scripture could be dispensed with; but at least in the earlier period they accorded it the tribute of testifying that as a gift of the same Spirit it could not be contradicted



by the private revelations. As a fact, the chief ground of the quarrel with them in the first instance was that they made too much instead of too little of the Bible, that their imagination had been fired by its social gospel and its prophetic visions, and that they thought the ideas of the Kingdom of God and of human brotherhood to be capable of concrete realisation in political institutions and in economic and social life. The position of Barclay is circumspectly chosen. He maintains the principle of his school, by protesting that the revelations may not be subjected to Scripture as a more certain touchstone, and he rules out all mischievous elements of doctrine or ethical ideal by providing that the revealed utterances shall not contradict Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This may well seem to be to reject the biblical touchstone in name and to make reverent use of it in practice.

The view that the original deposit of the biblical revelation has been supplemented by private revelations is met with in many gradations. It would often seem as if the main thing contended for by those who claimed special communications was that they enjoyed the gracious help of the Holy Spirit in thinking out their theological difficulties, in applying Christian principles to the concrete world of politics, business and social intercourse, and in taking the numerous decisions that are called for by the circumstances and the events of the day. Protestant orthodoxy could go even further, and, provided no addition to the stock of doctrine was claimed, could believe in the continuance of the power of prediction. It is stated by Knox, for example, that George Wishart 'fore-spake in the audience of many such things as some towns and the whole realm afterwards

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 1676-8. See App. G, Barclay's Propositions.

felt.'<sup>1</sup> When the private revelations have been appealed to for instruction in doctrine they have frequently been made use of to discredit positions of orthodox theology. It is noteworthy that they have been specially levelled against articles of the evangelical scheme of Christianity. Among the Anabaptists Schwenkfeld combined the principle of the inner light with violent opposition to the doctrine of justification by faith; and it was characteristic of the school generally that they shifted the emphasis from the Cross to the indwelling Christ as the ground of salvation. There was also much opposition to the predestinarian tenets, with accentuation of the universality of the love of God and of the scope of the Atonement, although there was also a section which realised the close affinity with their fundamental principle of that theological system which depends most entirely upon God. It was an important part of the purpose of the revelations of Swedenborg to correct the errors into which he believed that the Church had been led by Luther and Calvin. Swedenborg's teaching was in the main intended as a deeper and richer interpretation of Scripture, with supplementary information as to the unseen world, and the conditions of existence of departed spirits. In other cases the interest has been, not so much in doctrine, as in moral and social ideals. The burden of the Montanist message was that the Church should return to the purity and the moral rigour of the first age. The Anabaptists dreamed of a millennium, and, failing this, of a political and social order that would be governed more palpably by the principles of Christ.

The theology of the inner light has had still more

<sup>1</sup> *The Reformation in Scotland*, i. 125.

radical developments. The Puritan upheaval gave birth to bands of fanatics, popularly known as Ranters, who professed a pantheistic creed that involved the denial of the personality of God and of the immortality of the soul, and who seem to have conceived that the goal of religious development was reached in emancipation from the demands of the moral law. One division of Quakerism moved in the direction of theological rationalism, and rested in an ethical monotheism which broke more or less with the supernaturalism of the Christian system while it conserved its moral precepts concerning inwardness and meekness.

## II

The School of the Spirit, if we may speak of it as a whole, had the merit of perceiving certain facts, and of taking seriously certain truths, to which full justice was not done in orthodox Protestantism.<sup>1</sup>

It was right in its explicit affirmation that the one absolute authority is God or the Holy Spirit. It also made the just observation that Christianity is not a religion of the letter, conveying to us in a book a code of elaborated doctrines which it is the sole business of theology to reproduce, and also a collection of divine enactments which furnish guidance in the form of proof texts for most of the capital questions dealt with in Church and State, and in the various relationships of the individual life. It took its own way of expressing the fact that the Christian revelation has imposed grave responsibilities upon the Christian mind in the way of thinking out its intellectual content, and also of

<sup>1</sup> This attitude is well illustrated in a recent notable book—W. B. Ritchie, *Revelation and Religious Certitude*, 1907, ch. iii.



applying its ethical principles to the different spheres of human activity.

What we are now concerned with, however, is the distinctive theory of private revelations, and we have to ask whether there is ground for supposing that subsequently to the apostolic age supernatural communications have been made to saintly or prophetic men which constitute an addition to, or a correction of, the doctrinal knowledge which is bound up with the Christian revelation.

1. The strongest argument which is put forward in support of the general position of the school is that it is justified by the precedent and analogy of the period of Christian origins. It is a curious view of history, it is often said, and an unbelieving view, to suppose that in a past age God held converse with men, but that for well-nigh two thousand years He has kept silence. Is it consistent with the idea of God as the living God that we should think of Him as having passed out of our life, and given us in place of Himself a book which we ominously describe by the name of a Testament? Upon this it is to be observed in the first place that Protestant theology never asserted the thoroughgoing contrast which is imputed to it as between a primitive period when God spake by His Spirit, and the subsequent centuries when He has spoken only through a book. It was never doubted that in the present dispensation the activity of the Spirit is intimate, incessant and necessary in enabling the minds of men to understand and lay hold of divine truth. Nor was it doubted that those who seek counsel of God in their perplexity receive guidance by the gracious operations of the same Spirit on condition that they make use of the Word and of prayer as the appointed means of

grace. The question was not whether the Spirit of God still dwells with men, enlightening their minds in the knowledge of divine things, but whether He continues to do this in the same immediate way which is affirmed of the biblical writers, and with the same result of imparting knowledge which was previously hidden from human eyes. In regard to this, it may be pointed out in the first place that the divine help enjoyed by the sacred writers was to some extent the same which we possess. They drew largely upon the revelation of God in nature and history and in the constitution of man, and formed their reflections upon the same; and they did this with the help of the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. On the other hand it is quite clear that all subsequent Christian literature stands in a derivative and secondary relation to the canonical Scriptures; and it is a most reasonable inference from this contrast that, while theology has done its work with the help of a general assistance of the Spirit, the original period witnessed a special enlightenment which has not been repeated in the same form. When a golden age occurs in literature, philosophy or art, it is customary for many succeeding generations to live upon its wealth, and to be content to value their own achievements as secondary and derivative; and this analogy at least suggests a justification of the view that religious history reached a unique height in the primitive Christian age which contained factors and achievements that have not been repeated, and that will not be eclipsed.

The arguments brought to bear in Protestant polemics against the principle of continuous revelations are not all of equal cogency.<sup>1</sup> One is of a kind which is suggestive of a train of reasoning afterwards employed

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutio*, i. 9.

in a more serious issue by Hume, and is to the effect that, even if private revelations should be received, it would be impossible to prove them to others. The prophet, it was said, may be absolutely assured of his possession of a divine gift, but he is powerless to convince others of the divine origin of his message. He is unable, it was meant, to point to signs of miraculous knowledge or power as accrediting and supporting his claim. But it is conceivable that he might be believed on the strength of a message which conveyed to other minds inherent evidence of its truth; and as a fact the case of Swedenborg, not to speak of that of Mohammed, shows that it is at least possible for a claimant of supernatural illumination to induce a multitude to admit the claim. A second objection which was emphatically urged was that the doctrine of the inner light is discredited by its practical consequences, since it is found to lead to Antinomian practices and to revolutionary projects. This generalisation was mainly founded on the excesses of certain Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, who undoubtedly make an impression of moral as well as intellectual lunacy; but it has been made clear that the Protestant tradition judged this movement by its worst examples, ignored the ethical idealism which entered into their dreams, and passed an anathema on all which was only merited by a few. It is, indeed, one of the tragedies of history that men like Hübmaier and Denck, and a great company of victims who followed them to the slaughter, should have been involved in the same condemnation with Münzer and John of Leyden.<sup>1</sup> In the Puritan period much of the intense moral earnest-

<sup>1</sup> Materials for a more intelligent and sympathetic judgment are supplied by R. M. Jones, *op. cit.*, chs. xvi., xvii. See also Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 1907, vol. ii. p. 430 ff.



ness of the time, as well as an Antinomian doctrine, is to be set to the account of the professed adherents of the School of the Spirit. And when the charge of Antinomianism is repeated it ought to be considered that the purity and meekness of Quaker morality have been no mean off-set to the failings of the Anabaptist forerunners.

2. The cardinal question, as has been said, is whether we have ground for supposing that any communications have been immediately made to prophetic men which constitute a real addition to religious knowledge, and which may be regarded as an independent supplement to the knowledge which we possess in the Christian revelation. On the real point at issue—viz. whether there has been an addition made to doctrine, it may be confidently affirmed that there is none among the claimants who can be plausibly regarded as adding to the stock of our knowledge of divine things. To the most remarkable of the group theology owes far less than it owes to the great Christian thinkers who merely claimed that, in dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit, they laboured at the interpretation and the explication of the records of the Christian revelation, or who meditated on the continued manifestation of Himself which God gives in the supplementary Bible of history, and in the experiences of the individual life. The only cases in which it seems credible that there has been an extension of vision are that, in moments of exaltation, there may have been a dim vision of things to come, and that it may have been permitted to gain some impression of the conditions of the intermediate state over which the apostolic hand has flung a veil. At all events there is certainly no contribution from this quarter which can be set alongside of the commanding books of the New

Testament as an improvement upon, still less as a corrective of, the exposition therein handed on of the essential content of the Christian salvation.

The justification of a theology of the Spirit is proclaimed in the Fourth Gospel in conjunction with its governing conditions. There is the strongest declaration of a destined progress in knowledge under the guidance of the Spirit, and there is no indication that a temporal limit was intended to be set up after which the process would come to an end. But on the other hand it is declared that there is a fixed datum in the revelation and gift of God in Christ, and that progress will bear the character of a fuller manifestation of 'the things of Christ.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is only the mind which works on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ, and seeks to know more of the being and the saving works of God through that revelation, which has the promise of increasing enlightenment and of growing fruitfulness. It is not true that the Spirit only acts through the Word in a mechanical way; but it is profoundly true that the condition of spiritual illumination for theoretical thinking or for life is, that the mind should be rooted in the faith, and steeped in the Spirit, which are expressed in the Word of God as uttered in Christ. On the other hand, religious thinking which severs itself from the historical revelation, and which values its speculations and judgments as a revelation that makes the Bible a superfluity, readily falls a prey to the most fantastic illusions, or, finding out its self-deception, seeks some consolation for the humiliation which has overtaken it in an all-leveiling Rationalism.

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 13, 14.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RATIONALISTIC PRINCIPLE

FOLLOWING the historical order we have next to deal with the type of thought which challenged the presuppositions common to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and the School of the Spirit, and which denied that Christian knowledge has any claim to a special divine origin. This is the doctrine of Rationalism, according to which human reason is the exclusive source of any knowledge which we possess regarding the Supreme Being, and the duty and the destiny of man, and also is an adequate instrument for the attainment of man's chief end.

The Roman Catholic and Protestant systems contained elements which, in the course of time, and with a decay in the intensity of faith and of religious feeling, were bound to be emphasised and isolated so as to yield a purely rationalistic theory of religious knowledge. It is undeniable that religious truth is apprehended and taken possession of by an activity of the mind; and it was not unnatural to advance to the further position of supposing that reason, which was able to appropriate religious truth, had also been competent to discover it. Further, it was widely held that the general revelation made to the rational and moral nature of man embodied all-important truth, and from this there was an easy transition to the view that it contained all the truth which is of importance. Yet again it was Protestant doctrine that the truth of revelation is sealed by an inward witness of the Holy



Spirit given in the hearts of believers, and it was natural for thinkers who brought to their task no deep religious experience to interpret the witness of the Holy Spirit as nothing more than a rational judgment formulated in the language of piety. Add to this that the human mind, emancipated at the Reformation from ecclesiastical fetters, became ever more conscious of its strength, while the power and the assurance exhibited by religion in the golden age of the Reformation gave place to the phenomena of a silver if not even of a leaden age, and it is not surprising that one issue of the development was the advent of the thoroughgoing Rationalism which held that man requires no higher aid, and that in any case there is no evidence that religion has brought a divine gift of knowledge within his reach.

Rationalism is employed here in its special theological sense. In philosophy it has been employed to describe the standpoint of those who hold that knowledge—or at least the really important kind of knowledge—is derived from the intuitions and the deductions of reason, and is not merely due to the manipulation of sense-impressions. In this philosophical use it is the antithesis of Empiricism. For theology Empiricism and philosophical Rationalism come under the same rubric of Rationalism in so far as either claims to speak the last word on religious problems. The identifying note of the theological rationalist is that he holds that our knowledge of the matters handled in theology, be it much or little, or practically nothing, is derived from the unaided operations of the human intellect. On the other hand, the epithet rationalistic has been improperly applied by representatives of Protestant orthodoxy to schools which take up a freer attitude towards certain positions of the Protestant

tradition. A theology is not necessarily rationalistic because it does critical work upon ecclesiastical doctrines which may plausibly claim Scriptural support. Nor it is rationalistic to operate critically and speculatively upon the data of Scripture so long as the norm is faithfully derived from revelation through Scripture. The distinctive mark of Rationalism is that it imposes upon Scripture and revelation a standard which has been derived from an extraneous intellectual source.

Theological Rationalism has been said to involve two principles, that reason is a trustworthy authority, and also that it is the exclusive authority in the religious and moral spheres. The first of these principles is not its distinctive possession, as it has been widely accepted in schools of revealed theology. It has only been as a passing phase, and under the stress of unusual polemical conditions, that theology has taken up the ground that the human mind, whether as the result of inherent weakness, or of deterioration consequent upon the Fall, is absolutely unaccredited and untrustworthy in its incursions into the realms of religion or morality. The real issue is only reached when it is affirmed that reason is the exclusive authority—the sole source and norm, in matters of religion. This principle has been held by a variety of schools, which at the same time have differed widely in their conclusions as to what is to be accepted as religious doctrine in the name of reason.

## I

The first noteworthy type of theological Rationalism was the English Deism of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> The theology of the Cambridge platonists was not a true Rationalism so far as its principle was, 'Reason discovers what is natural, and reason receives what is supernatural.'—Tulloch, *Rational Theology in England in Seventeenth Century*<sup>2</sup>, 1874.

had a precursor in Socinianism, though the latter was only half conscious of its own germinal principle. The fundamental doctrine of Deism was that man has by nature sufficient light for faith in God, for conduct and for salvation. The essence of all religion, it was conceived, as of all sound philosophy, consists of the rational truths which are summarily comprehended under the names of God and the soul, morality and immortality. The value of Christianity and of Scripture, it was held, was due to the fact that they enshrined these truths of natural religion in a relatively pure form; and the more abstruse and mysterious doctrines with which they had been associated in the ecclesiastical tradition, and in a lesser degree in Scripture, were dismissed as superfluous, if not even as mischievous additions. While the English Deists contented themselves in the main with attacking the positions of supernatural religion, the German rationalists worked over the whole scheme of systematic theology from the deistic standpoint, and expounded the doctrinal residuum that survived after the elimination of the miraculous, and the reduction of the Person of Christ to the limits of the wise teacher and the inspiring example.

1. We may advert to the reasons which were given by this school for dispensing with the hypothesis of a special revelation as a source of knowledge of divine things.<sup>1</sup> The principle of the sufficiency of reason, it was held, is supported by the analogy of the general order under which we live. Every creature is furnished with the powers that are needed to enable it to fulfil the end of its being; and as the chief end of man includes a right relation to God and duty, he must be supposed to

<sup>1</sup> Wegscheider, *Institutiones Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae* 6, 1815, 7<sup>te</sup> Auf. 1833, § 6 ff.



acquire, through the use of his natural endowment of reason and conscience, the requisite knowledge of the demands of religion and morality. But while it is well arguable that man has a claim upon God for the satisfaction of his chiefest wants, it is not evident that we are entitled to dogmatise as to the way in which God must have responded to his appeal for light and help. Still more unwarranted was the assumption that the perfect religion must have been in the world, not merely as implicit promise, but as fulfilment, from the beginning. Christianity can make an honest adaptation of modern ideas of development, but these are fatal to the deistic scheme of thought—with its conception of a universal and perennial creed belonging to man as man. To deny the sufficiency of reason, it was further argued, is dishonouring to human nature, and by consequence to the Author of human nature. For reason is the chief ornament of the constitution of man; and to charge it with impotency, or even with insufficiency, for the tasks which confront it, is to cast a slur upon the crowning work of the Creator. But it does not appear that it derogates from the wisdom of God to suppose that He progressively equipped mankind with the spiritual resources needed for the gradual attainment of the highest level of his destiny. Again, it was said that the rationalistic principle must at least be conceded at one fundamental and decisive point. Many religions claim to be supernatural in their origin, and as reason is the only arbiter between the rival claimants, this was held to imply the admission that reason is the supreme authority. It is quite conceivable, however, that Christianity should submit its claims to reason, while yet the verdict should be that it had made good the position that there is a higher authority to which

it is the duty and privilege of the intellect to submit. Once more, it was argued that reason alone can stand sponsor for all time for a body of assured religious truths, since in the nature of the case a faith which depends on an alleged historical revelation must grow more and more precarious and self-distrustful with the lapse of the centuries.<sup>1</sup> This observation touches upon an issue of real gravity; and if Christian faith rested entirely upon historic testimony there would be good reason to expect that it would gradually be subverted by the corroding criticism of the literary sources, and by the effacing influences of time. But as we have seen, it is an integral part of the authentic Protestant theory that Christian faith, while resting on a basis of historical facts, has an ever-renewed corroboration of the quality of its essential beliefs in the form of a divinely wrought conviction of their divine truth. And it may be strongly argued that to the Christian convictions thus wrought and guaranteed a stronger measure of assurance attaches in the Christian mind than can be claimed for any set of doctrines which have been promulgated as an alternative rationalistic creed.

2. Eighteenth-century Deism produced some results of abiding value—in the interest which it aroused in other religions, in the stimulus which it gave to the unfettered investigation of Scripture, and above all in its insistence that faith should seek to cultivate a good intellectual conscience, and base itself on verifiable reality. But in its main contentions it was wrong. It was wrong in supposing that its fundamental doctrines were derived immediately from reason—they were

<sup>1</sup> 'Omnino nulla revelatio quae sicut historia aliorum testimoniis nititur, tam certam nobis potest persuasionem afferre, quam quae ex ratione proficiscitur.'—Wegscheider, *ibid.*

actually won by it as a meagre selection from doctrines of the Christian religion that had been embodied in Scripture and diffused by the Church. It was wrong in declaring that they have been present in all religions from the beginning of the world: there are traces of belief in a Supreme Being even in religions of the lower culture, and an element of moralism extends beyond the pale even of the characteristically ethical religions; but no student of comparative religion will now claim that there is a scheme of doctrines of natural religion which has been believed *semper et ubique et ab omnibus*. The procedure of Deism in relation to the source and norm of doctrine was akin in principle to the method of Protestant theology. Its actual source was Scripture; it subjected its contents to a selective process, and it extracted from it a scheme of doctrine which impressed it as making up the body of indispensable and saving truth. It was as a fact all-important truth which Deism extracted, but the school was not adequately furnished for taking possession of the whole truth. It searched the Scriptures without the spiritual equipment or tact of the Reformers—operating with a common sense which it called reason instead of with a mind enriched by a vital Christian experience; and the result was that it collected from Scripture only a fragmentary form of the revelation of which Scripture is the recorder and interpreter.

## II

The second type of Rationalism which falls to be considered is that represented by the work of modern philosophy within the sphere that is occupied by religious belief. Previously to the eighteenth century,



philosophy was chary of discussing the particular doctrines of the Christian system. It usually contented itself with furnishing some reasoned support to the doctrines of Natural Theology, while for the rest it commonly professed to recognise the title of Theology, in reliance on its command of revealed knowledge, to instruct mankind in regard to articles of the Christian creed which were either above reason or undiscoverable by reason. Modern philosophy, following the lead of Spinoza,<sup>1</sup> abandoned the concession or convention that there was anything in the Christian system which it was not qualified to handle and to adjudicate upon, and it proceeded to expound and value the cardinal doctrines in accordance with its own special criterion.

This rationalistic treatment of Christian doctrine has been conducted with varying degrees of friendliness and hostility. The type of thought represented by Kant and Hegel and by later idealists takes up a conciliatory attitude towards Christianity, and finds that the substance of its doctrine is capable of a rational exposition and of a reasoned justification. It is not of course doubtful that Kant and Hegel subscribed as heartily to the rationalistic principle as the eighteenth-century deists, although on other grounds they despised and discredited their religious philosophy. Like them they made a system of rational ideas the criterion of Christian truth, and the chief improvement they claimed to effect was that the system which they used as the touchstone was more profound and comprehensive than the popular philosophy of the previous age. The position of Kant was that the one reliable guide which we may

<sup>1</sup> The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was in this respect epoch-making.

implicitly follow in religion is the practical reason or conscience; and that when we have defined the ends of the moral life, measured its resources, and drawn out its metaphysical implications, we are in possession of all the religious truth available for man, and also of all the truth that has been historically handed down in the Christian system. A scheme of moral philosophy which finds room for the hope of immortality and acknowledges the need of faith in God was what was held to be unfolded—no doubt in somewhat curious and even cryptic form—in the ecclesiastical systems of theological doctrine. For Hegel the organ of religious knowledge was the theoretical reason; and the system of Christian doctrine which had the seal of absolute truth was held to culminate in the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation as speculatively construed. It may, however, be doubted if the method of the philosophical group was not a more radical innovation than that of the rationalists of the older school. The truths which the former made normative for Scripture were at least derived by reason from Scripture before they were given back to it as its doctrinal criterion. The Kantian and Hegelian systems, on the other hand, though they had undoubtedly absorbed many elements from Christianity, owed their main features to metaphysical reflection; and the practical outcome was that an alien intellectual standard was brought to bear upon the contents and the interpretation of revelation. It may also be thought that the agnostic element in Kant, and the Hegelian uncertainty upon certain issues of cardinal religious moment, afford an additional proof that the systems in question cannot confidently be employed as the criteria of Christian doctrine.

Since Kant and Hegel, it has been realised that

philosophy may not ignore the contribution made by religion to the interpretation of existence, and almost every considerable thinker—whatever the type and degree of his personal religion—has felt called upon to outline his scheme of religious philosophy. The sympathetic succession was continued by Edward Caird, and notably by Lotze, who in his *Mikrokosmos* handled many of the topics of dogmatic theology with eagerness and insight. Martineau occupied similar ground to Kant in identifying the substance of Christianity with his religious and ethical system,<sup>1</sup> but he showed a deeper understanding of purely religious interests, and in particular of the debt of the world to Jesus Christ. In recent times there have been many additions to the unsympathetic succession, which brings the Christian stock of ideas to the test of reason and finds them to be little or nothing of a contribution to knowledge. Spencer devoted a considerable portion of his encyclopædic labour to the examination of the origin of religious beliefs and institutions, and of their serviceableness and validity; while he reduced the abiding content of religion to the sense of mystery, and to the traces of an agnostic conception of the ultimate reality which may be found to attend upon the deeper thinking even of Christian theology. Höffding has also sought to analyse and interpret the religious phenomena, and has announced as the sum of the matter that what is aimed at in religion is 'the conservation of values.'<sup>2</sup> Whether religion accomplishes what it aims at—whether there is

<sup>1</sup> 'That this part contains a summary of the same ethical doctrine as the *Types of Ethical Theory* will not, I hope, be regarded as an inexcusable iteration. In its distinctive characteristic I find, in truth, the very seat of authority of which I was in search.'—*The Seat of Authority in Religion*, 1890, Preface, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophy of Religion*, E. Tr., 1906, *passim*.



an underlying and besetting power which will preserve the most valuable products of history from the menacing forces of time and change, is a question which, crucial as it is, Höffding does not directly decide. Another form of Rationalism which arrogates to itself the name on the ground that it is the ripest product of reason, seeks to eliminate the religious ideas as 'the baseless fabric of a vision' from the solid world of naturalistic thought.

The treatment of religion in modern philosophy usually rests upon two assumptions. The first is that the materials available for a religious doctrine consist of data of nature, human nature, and human history that belong to a closed system in which everything that happens is due to purely natural forces operating in accordance with fixed laws. The second is that for the interpretation of the facts of existence the sufficient instrument is the human mind acting with the use of its natural powers, and with a disclaimer of any supernatural aid from an alleged revelation. These positions are assumed rather than proved by modern thinkers. In latter-day treatises on the philosophy of religion we hardly look for a statement of the grounds, such as was furnished by eighteenth-century Rationalism, on which the supernatural element in history is discounted and the all-sufficiency of reason is maintained.<sup>1</sup> The main reasons for setting aside the claim of a special revelation may, however, be indicated.

1. To begin with, it was a psychological necessity that philosophy should increasingly magnify its office and extend its claim. The task which it was originally

<sup>1</sup> Martineau and Höffding are among the few who argue the rationalistic case with knowledge of theology.

allowed, and indeed invited to take up, was to find out what may be known about God, the world and man by the use of the unaided powers of human nature, and it was not to be expected that it would continue to think and to profess that it had suffered serious impoverishment by the acceptance of this limitation. Self-respect could hardly fail to make it advance to the position that what it was able to discover and verify by its own methods and instruments in its allotted field was of more value than other contributions, and was even the full measure of knowable reality. But while it was right and proper that the human mind was set free to make its autonomous contribution to religious knowledge, it is evident that freedom from the control of revelation might, from another point of view, work out as a disabling restriction in the outlook upon the universe. The question in fact must be raised as to whether the limitations under which philosophy does its work—in particular, its axiom that it is bound to ignore the possibilities of supernatural religion—are not more fitly compared to the conventions by which it is found expedient to regulate games, than accepted as the absolutely ideal conditions for the attainment of ultimate truth. From the point of view of a revealed theology, the prejudice against a special revelation seems no more convincing than an argument that, because boys may learn to run surprisingly fast in a sack-race, this marks the possible limit of their speed. It may also suggest the argument that, because one can manage to read by candle-light, the sun may be regarded as superfluous.

2. A second reason why it is widely supposed that the rationalistic theory can be taken for granted is that it has the support of an impressive analogy. The mind



of man, setting to work upon the stupendous problems which confronted it upon earth, and in unqualified reliance upon its own inherent powers, has accomplished results so splendid as to suggest that all things have been delivered into its keeping. In every other department of human labour, man is seen to have been called on to cope with colossal tasks under seemingly overwhelming difficulties, supported only by his natural equipment of strength, wisdom and courage; and on the whole he has proved equal to the situation—subduing the earth, making its forces subservient to his material well-being, and effecting the most dazzling achievements, not only in industry, but in science and politics, in literature and the arts. And it seems to be dictated by loyalty to the general order of things that, in the sphere of religion and morals as well, he should be supposed to have been placed on the same footing of self-dependence, and to have been commissioned to labour for results which should be his own achievement, equally with his wealth and his science, and which should at least be approximate to his other knowledge in point of certainty and value.

There are, however, good grounds for thinking that the resources of human nature are less adequate for coping with the religious and moral tasks of human life than for responding to the demands which have been made upon it for the advancement of the material well-being of the race, and for political and scientific achievements. While grappling in a self-reliant spirit with the questions which are of the most momentous importance for faith and conduct, the human mind has not accomplished results which justify us in according it the confidence which we repose in its labours in its other spheres of activity. The two great tests of its



success must be, whether reason has duly instructed us as to the nature of the Supreme Being and His relations to man, and also whether it has disclosed the secret of moral power. Touching the nature of the Supreme Being, there is no definite and confident instruction from the world of rational speculation. There is infinite debate as to whether we may or may not profess to know the nature of the ultimate reality; while those who profess to know are at issue as to whether it is to be conceived as of the nature of matter or spirit, and if spiritual, whether it is to be conceived as personal or impersonal spirit. The other fundamental problem on which we are entitled to expect a satisfying contribution from rational thought, if it really possesses the note of sufficiency, is how man may accomplish his moral destiny, and advance in the formation of noble character to the goal of moral perfection. Philosophy has long recognised and faced this problem; but though it has reflected much and deeply upon the moral dynamic, it has no effective guidance to give as to the way in which the power is generated that ensures to man the victory over evil, and enables him to attain to the chief end of his moral being. The truth is that the twofold argument of the patristic apologetic still holds—that our intellectual blindness, and above all our moral weakness, make a pathetic appeal for the direct help of God.

## I

From these general considerations we proceed to the examination of the two main positions of the rationalistic theory. Its fundamental principle, as has been said, is that the universe is a closed system in which everything that has come to be is the result of forces

which are immanent in nature, and which operate in accordance with a limited code of natural laws. It may be granted that in the last resort God is the ground of the universe, and of the processes and the finite beings which it contains and sustains; but all His acts are supposed to be mediated through an unchangeable system of second causes, and supernatural or direct divine agency is ruled out as an illegitimate hypothesis. The unwillingness to admit supernatural agency, as a factor operative in conjunction with natural causation, rests upon reasons which carry great weight with the modern mind. It is repugnant to the scientific instinct to postulate more than one cause or principle when one such is conceivably sufficient; and besides, the theory of intermittent miraculous agency seems to imperil the coherence, the stability and the reliability of the fabric of knowledge. The view has seemed to receive overwhelming corroboration from the discoveries which have so vastly enlarged the realm within which natural agency has been demonstrated, and which have correspondingly diminished the field within which supernatural agency remains a possibility. Once more, it is agreed that the universe is a cosmos, and the naturalistic theory is the most obvious way of conceiving and representing an orderly universe. But these considerations are not conclusive. It is extremely probable that the realm of reality is more complex than the scientific instinct finds convenient for its special purposes. The proof that there is a natural order which reaches much further than was formerly supposed is no proof that this order has embraced the totality of cosmic development and finite being. And finally, the character of the universe as a cosmos may very well consist in the fact, not that it is a uniform system, but that it is a harmonious com-

combination of different methods of divine activity as well as of different realms and modes of being.

1. That a true explanation of the universe will be somewhat complex is antecedently probable from the extreme diversity of the two types of existence with which we are familiar. We find ourselves among realities of two different kinds which we distinguish as a material world and a spiritual world, and whose inter-relations it is extremely difficult to account for in a satisfactory or even an intelligible way. It is, now, on the facts of the material realm that the theory of natural causation is mainly based; and it seems in the main to be true of the material world as we know it that its events have their antecedents in material causes. And yet it is by no means clear that the events of the material world are, and always have been, wholly determined by antecedent causes of a material order. For it is not an entirely obsolete theory that there are entities of the spiritual realm known as human souls which direct the operations of the body, and which thus strike effectively into the realm of matter and motion, and modify to some extent the chain of physical causation. And if finite spirits accomplish work in the material world by at least directing and organising its forces, it is only reasonable to believe that the infinite Spirit stands to it in more fundamental and dominant relations, and exercises a superintending and directing power which constitutes an effective government of the world. But next, it is to be observed that the conception of thoroughgoing natural causation is considerably less plausible in its application to the spiritual than to the material sphere. Here also, no doubt, there exists a system of ordered action in which we can trace a connection of causes and effects—as when



we account for the character and conduct of individuals by reference to the forces of heredity, of education and social environment, or when we detail the material and moral causes which explain national statistics of emigration, marriage and crime. But the fact is obvious that in this sphere we have to do with forces of which we cannot make affirmations with the same confidence with which we dogmatise about matter and energy. In the spiritual realm there is much which leads us to suppose that we have to reckon with two systems—one which is based on the general idea of natural causation, and another which, crossing and interpenetrating it, introduces fresh powers, makes new departures, and works for larger results. The making of man is very credibly conceived as a meeting-place at which the forces of a higher spiritual world were asserted at the heart of an ordered terrestrial process, and a spiritual being was created by God after His own image. It is probable, again, that the origin of individual souls rests upon a combination of the factors of the two systems—one being vouched for in the influence of heredity, the other in the power that brings a new personality into existence. The origin of the individual soul seems properly to be conceived as a creative act; for while in the material world as we now know it the new object is made out of pre-existent material of a similar kind, and involves the using up of this material, the realm of spiritual existence can receive indefinite additions in the admission of new personalities, and this without the necessity of sacrificing or transforming earlier forms of spiritual being. It is only the commonplaceness of the event of birth which prevents us from realising that the emergence into existence of a new soul is a marvel of the first order, and that as regards what

is most distinctive, vital and valuable in its constitution, it seems to represent a creation out of nothing. It is easier to recognise a creative act in the appearance of the brilliantly abnormal; and the phenomenon of the transcendently great man has made it seem credible to some who can believe in no other form of miracle that a creative power occasionally does new things in the mysterious region in which the foundations of character and genius are laid.

2. When we pass to the wider field of the life of the nation or of the race, we discover groups of facts which point in the same direction. What we should naturally have expected was that the movement would have been steadily upward or steadily downward—that there would have been either uniform and sustained progress or equally methodical retrogression and decay. The actual situation has often exhibited a curious combination of both principles. One stage is that in which there takes place a remarkable quickening and enlargement of the powers, in virtue of which great and memorable things are done. This stage has its illustration in the period of greatness which seems to occur at least once in the history of the chosen nations, and which enriches the world with golden ages of literature, with epoch-making discoveries in science, or with a vision of political and social ideals of a world-compelling kind. Upon this there usually follows a period of declension in which there is a wider dissemination of the wealth, but in which also there is a marked diminution of the productive power, and eventually also of the assimilative power. The life becomes less full and intense, the power wanes, the light fails, and the salt almost seems to lose its savour. Up to a point it seems as if we were studying a process akin to the physical principle



of the dissipation of energy; and as a fact it is easy to point to races, nations and civilisations which seem to exemplify this principle down to the point of exhaustion and extinction. But there is no such law in the realm of spirit which can be affirmed to be fixed and inexorable. It is distinctive of those nations which have been called to tasks of the first magnitude in the services of civilisation and humanity that, while they are subject to the law of declension, there is a principle of rejuvenescence which persists at the basis of their life, and that the period of declension is the prelude to a new era of vision and power. The impression which is made, in short, is that from time to time a great addition is made to the stock of intellectual and moral energy, that on this and by this the world maintains its higher life at the same time that it gradually dissipates it, and that when exhaustion is threatened it may be replenished from the original source.

3. But it is especially in the history of religion and morals that the phenomena occur which suggest that we have to do in history with the interplay of two different systems, of which one takes the form of an immediate divine activity in the world. There is no sphere in which the operation of the law of degeneration is so palpably and generally operative. Whatever phase we strike in the study of a historical religion, we usually make the discovery that there has been recent increase of superstition, that the zeal of an earlier period has grown cold, that there has been a growth of moral weakness and corruption. When, therefore, on the one hand, we find that there have been from time to time new beginnings in which a religion has appeared that brought with it a great intensification of spiritual



life, and gave to humanity, or to some elect portion of it, a fresh start on a higher level; and when, on the other hand, we find that upon a period of decay and corruption that seems destined to end in death, there supervenes the event of the regeneration or rejuvenescence which checks and reverses the degenerative process; it is no far-fetched hypothesis that the fresh departures and the upward tendency are due to the influences of a higher spiritual world which have access under given conditions to the field of human experience. It is not necessary to suppose that these operate in an arbitrary and capricious way, and to admit that they constitute a violation of law. For they also must be under law—being regulated by the wisdom and the power of God; and this being so, they must be capable of fitting in with the laws of nature so as to form a higher unity and a richer cosmos.

It can be said that it is the distinctive contribution of religion as such to the interpretation of the world and of history, that it regards them as the sphere of a divine activity which controls, but which is not limited to, the events of the natural order. But it is specially in the Christian religion, with the preparatory dispensation in the religion of Israel, that God has been convincingly made known as accomplishing exceptional things in the supernatural or immediate way for the attainment of a unique end. The history of Israel has an impressive background of divine power, mercy and judgment, while its spiritual and ethical religion stands out in so marked contrast to the religion of the contemporary world, that the whole is justifiably described as the preliminary phase of an extraordinary self-disclosure of God. The particular miracles of the

Old Testament history are of varying degrees of credibility, and some are clearly providential wonders rather than miracles in the strict sense of the term; but the dispensation as a whole formed a new beginning in the higher history of the human race and seems to bear the hall-mark of the Creator. In the origins of Christianity, especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we find the weightiest evidence of the presence in the world of an immediate divine causality. His character of sinless perfection, which carries with it irresistible evidence of historical reality, is inexplicable without the assumption of an enduement of spiritual power beyond that which is at the command of man as man; and the religion which He founded also shows clear marks of coming from a source which owed little to man save the commission to instruct, to reprove and to deliver him. We also have a distinct view of the higher economy in the resurrection of Christ, which has for its evidence not merely reports handed on from witnesses, but the existence of a world-wide institution that was brought into being by the belief that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead. There are also facts of the later centuries which powerfully support the credibility of the supernatural in the primitive history of Christianity. It is a widely diffused experience within the Christian society that there is a process in which the mind undergoes an illumination that transforms its whole outlook, and in which the will is energised to pursue new and higher ends; and it is the belief of those in whom these experiences occur in decisive form that they are due, not to the utilisation of latent personal resources of wisdom or goodness, but to the enabling might of the wonder-working Spirit of God.

## II

The second fundamental assumption of Rationalism, which indeed is dependent upon the former, is that the mind has been restricted to the use of its natural powers in the discovery and appropriation of religious and moral truth. The notion is rejected that at any stage of the process the mind has been aided by an immediate action upon it of the Divine Spirit, as the result of which it is enabled to take possession of truth that would otherwise lie beyond its ken and its grasp.

1. In examining this position we naturally begin by inquiring as to the nature and origin of those natural powers of the mind on which dependence is placed as adequate for the task of religious thinking. It appears that, for the manipulation of its material, the mind possesses an equipment which includes forms of sense-perception, categories of the understanding and ideas of reason. With these it gets to work, clarifying and systematising its data, and developing them into reasoned knowledge by inductive and deductive processes. But it would seem that it is only with a qualification that these can be spoken of as natural powers. They represent the conditions and the equipment with which rational humanity now does its normal work; but the further question arises as to how man came to possess the intellectual apparatus by which he reduces the given material to an ordered scheme of knowledge. No hypothesis is more reasonable, as has been said, than that the natural powers of the human mind were in their origin a supernatural gift which was needed to raise an animal species to the plane of humanity; and if this be so, the rationalistic theory has no more plausibility than an assumption that



a son who has received from his father the capital needed to establish him in business cannot possibly expect at a later date to receive anything additional as a supplement or an inheritance. The presumption lies the other way in the human parallel; and it may well be asked why God, who gave reason to man, may not have given to a higher order of prophetic men the capacity of yet deeper insight into the facts and the laws of the religious and moral plane.

2. But further, it is by no means proved that man as we know him is restricted to the use of what are called his natural powers. Apart from the phenomena of the distinctively religious sphere, there are facts which suggest that the human mind is not entirely limited in its search for truth to the work of observation and reasoning. One suggestive fact is the abnormal power of genius—a power which, acting by a kind of divination, takes short cuts to great generalisations in the realms of science or philosophy, or which works up masses of casual material into the new and imposing combinations of poetic genius. It must at least be accounted possible that in the mental activity of the man of genius there is a point at which a creative activity of the Divine Spirit imports something new into the natural order. Yet again, it is by no means clear that the contents of our minds are traceable exclusively either to the individual's own observation and reflection, or to communications from other minds which have been conveyed through the instrumentality of language or other sensible signs. It is not an unsupported poetic fancy that soul to soul may 'strike through a finer medium of its own.' The mind of a multitude may take so forcible possession of the mind of the individual units as to give them a

single fixed idea and purpose. There is also a collective spirit of the age which, in mystic fashion, colours the thinking of many different workers, and guides them to the separate announcement of ideas and aims, while these are often hailed as an expression and interpretation of ideas which their generation as a whole was attempting to express. If such receptiveness be traceable in relation to a group of finite minds, it may well be believed that the human mind as such lies open to mystical influences which flow in upon it from the side of God. The marvel, indeed, would be if it should be within the power of the human spirit to resist all impression of the influences of the infinite Spirit by which it is sustained, penetrated and beset. That it is not in its power absolutely to fence itself off from the divine is attested by the universality of religion. And that which is evidenced in the normal human experience may well be supposed to have been given in enlarged measure to souls rendered receptive by the expectancy of faith and by the self-surrender of obedience.

3. We have already stated the main ground on which the Christian believes that the Scriptures contain a body of revealed truth. It is that those who have come to the knowledge of the grace and power of God in their own experience recognise the Scriptures as belonging to the same divine economy, and as showing the handiwork of a known God. To this, two special considerations have to be added. The depth and sublimity of the doctrine, the profound insight into human nature, the magnificent conceptions of God and the universe and of the course of history, seem to lead us upward from prophets and apostles of Palestine to the wisdom of a divine mind. Above all, the power that has accompanied these truths is deeply impressive. The greatest



thinkers who have reflected on God and duty have difficulty in getting a few bands of students together to study their ideas, while the truths that emanated from unlearned men of a small and uncultured country of the ancient world have created an œcumenical society for worship and philanthropy, and have deepened and enriched every department of the higher life of mankind. The least unreasonable explanation is that this was a point at which the system of immediate divine activity interpenetrated the system of His natural laws. It is true that it has to be emphasised that the divine enlightenment on which Scripture rests was of different kinds. We are not concerned to identify revelation with Scripture, and to say that it consisted in the supernatural communication of authoritative information on the whole of the wide range of subjects which are therein dealt with. One portion of the contents of Scripture represents the reflections of thoughtful and earnest men on the facts of the general order. A second stratum may be accounted for by saying that God wrought new things in the world, whether by way of Providence or of miraculous dealing, and that we possess a report and interpretation of these things as the result of a quickened insight. But there was also a supernatural illumination which was an integral and central part of the divine work, and it conveyed ideas which rank as revealed truths in the strict sense of the word.

It is an obvious difficulty that the ideas which are declared to be derived from revelation appear to be traceable to the same source as other ideas for which no such claim is put forward. The Old Testament prophets operate with conceptions which are met with elsewhere in the religious and moral life of mankind,



and these may therefore be supposed to have had their ultimate origin in the human mind whose impress and colour they bear. Similarly, the modes of thought and expression in which Christ and the apostles set forth their doctrine of God, and of the nature and terms of salvation, have the human moulding and colouring which seem to point to an origin in the ordinary mental workshop of our race. But it might well be that no single element of thought was new, and yet that the combination was splendidly original in its meaning and in its outcome. A poet does not need to invent a new language, nor does a thinker require to coin absolutely new conceptions, in order to give an original æsthetic creation or an original scientific theory to the world. Similarly in the case of the Christian revelation, it is true that the idea of God is old, and true that the ideas of fatherhood and love are old, while yet the combination of the ideas in the proposition that God is love—the loving Father of individual men and women—was an original truth of the first magnitude. There is no doubt a sense in which all religious language is imperfect because symbolical; but symbols do not fail to reach reality because they do not fully describe it; and the fact that revelation was given in the language of earth creates no more difficulty than that a parent should use a child's language, and should yet be able to convey to him knowledge which previously lay beyond the horizon of childhood.

It is not necessary to admit that the procedure of theology is irrational when it places reliance on a special revelation. Reason is an instrument for recognising, not for creating truth; and it is not irrational, but supremely rational, to recognise an additional realm of

reality if it can be authenticated, and to recognise a special gift for the understanding of reality if it can be credibly attested. It is patent that it is only by the use of our minds that we can grasp reality; but it may still be true that there are aspects of reality which the mind could not reach without divine help, and which continue, even when disclosed, to be inaccessible to reason until it is steeped in a special religious experience. In parallel cases the business of philosophy is not thought to be to supersede the particular sciences, but to respect them as dealing competently, so far as they go, with certain compartments of existence, and to work up their general results into a conjunct view of the nature and the significance of things. A philosophy of art is not supposed to break with the history of the æsthetic achievements of the race; similarly with political philosophy; and it may equally be urged that in the religious history of the race ideas and ideals have been working out under a special system which have a cogent claim to be an addition to the spiritual wealth of mankind, and to be employed as our best clue to the interpretation of the aspects of reality with which they are concerned.

The higher mind of the age is widely dominated, and possibly it will be increasingly dominated, by theological Rationalism. It is, however, not to be forgotten that the theory has been as firmly seated before in the intellectual life of the world, and that it has been dislodged before by a doctrine of revelation. The schools of Greece and Rome were rationalistic to the core; and their opposition was overcome—partly by the appeal which the Christian Gospel made to the mind by its satisfactory outlook on existence as a whole, and still more by the observation that it worked as the spring

of a regenerating and moralising energy. The revived Rationalism of the modern world is not at bottom more confident of itself; and it would probably yield to the same appeals if they were as effectively presented and pressed as was done by apostles and prophets in the ancient world. It is only as an episode in the ebb and flow of the spiritual life that reason can shut its eyes to the fact that the Christian view of existence and human life has no effective rival in any system which has been evolved by human speculation, and above all, that it has no rival as a source of moral regeneration and power. The offence of reason at theology is largely due to the fact that doctrines have been pressed on it as revealed which do not belong to the system, and that in bygone times science has been obstructed and persecuted in its legitimate sphere because there was supposed to be in Scripture a divinely revealed contribution to science which it was arrogant to ignore and sacrilegious to criticise. In the Middle Ages revelation was set up as the ruler to whose authority, real or alleged, philosophy had to bow; in the late Protestant period the former servant claimed authority over a deposed master; and it is conceivable that the final arrangement will be the concordat under which it will be recognised that, without detriment to the rights of philosophy and science, religion has its special domain of reality and its special principle of knowledge.



## CHAPTER V

### THE CRITERION OF FEELING

‘NOT being Christians, they have acquired no right to the Christian Scriptures; and it may be very fairly said to them: “Who are you? When and whence did you come? As you are none of mine, what have you to do with that which is mine? Indeed, Marcion, by what right do you hew my wood? By whose permission, Valentinus, are you diverting the streams of my fountain? By what power, Apelles, are you removing my landmarks? This is my property. Why are you, the rest, sowing and feeding here at your own pleasure? This is my property. I have long possessed it; I possessed it before you.”’<sup>1</sup>

These words of Tertullian may be cited as an expression of the resentment with which Christian piety has been wont to regard the attempts of Rationalism to amend Christianity, and in amending it to transform it. In particular they represent the attitude of the school of Schleiermacher towards the rationalistic schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### I

A new epoch in German theology was opened by Schleiermacher, who, besides exercising a penetrative influence in almost every department of theological science, sought to establish dogmatic theology on a new and independent basis. His distinctive standpoint was

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptione*, cap. 37. E. Tr. Ante-Nicene Library, vol. xv. p. 44.

first disclosed in his *Discourses on Religion*,<sup>1</sup> in which he attempted to reconcile the world of culture to religion by showing that its reason for despising religion was that it did not understand it, and that on discovering its essential nature it would revert to its allegiance. He gives a sombre picture of the new paganism which dominated the golden age of German literature. 'I know,' he says, 'that you have not only deserted the temples of the Highest, but that you have also ceased to worship Him in secret; and that you look on religion as if it were an old-fashioned costume such as often continues to be worn among the common people after it has been discarded by the upper classes.' This scornful attitude, he proceeds, was no mark of enlightenment. They supposed, in accordance with current views, that religion consisted partly in assenting to certain theological doctrines, partly in rendering obedience to the precepts of the moral law; and as they did not believe the doctrines, and had a science of morals to concern itself with conduct, they could regard religion as superfluous. The true conception of religion, he contended, is that it is an affair, not of the intellect or of the will, but of the heart. It is a state of devout feeling, describable as a sense of absolute dependence upon God. It is far more nearly akin to æsthetic feeling—such as the poet's feeling for nature, than to metaphysical thought or to moral conduct. The professed aim of the world of culture was the complete development of human powers and capacities; but a culture which left out the most elevated and refined of human feelings—a feeling expressive of man's relation to the Supreme Being, and of the essential

<sup>1</sup> *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1836, Bd. I., *Reden über die Religion*. E. Tr. with Introd., Oman, 1893.

condition of human existence—was unfaithful to its own ideal of perfection.

The essence of Christianity, in Schleiermacher's view, had been somewhat misapprehended by all schools of theology, but chiefly by the contemporary Rationalism which sought to reduce it to the doctrines of natural theology and of moral philosophy. He described this amended Christianity as 'a badly stitched patchwork of metaphysics and ethics.' 'They have transformed the fair temple,' he says again, 'into a ruin, and they are never happy save when they are further altering and defacing it.' His quarrel with Rationalism was based on various grounds. He had been touched by the romantic movement, which sought to understand and re-expound the chivalries, the splendours and the dreams of the great days of old; and to this type of mind the critic who reduced the beatific visions of Christian faith to a few common-sense propositions was on a level with the vandal who builds himself a house or a sheep-fold out of the stones of an ancient cathedral. But his opposition to deistic thought was chiefly dictated by his conception of the Christian religion as consisting in a complex of sacred feelings which the rationalistic doctrines did little to explain, and still less to foster and sustain.

## I

It might be supposed that the general conception of religion entertained by Schleiermacher involved the doom of dogmatic theology. If religion is not a doctrine, theoretical or ethical, but a feeling, it is not at first glance evident that there is any longer suitable material to work upon. But in his view the feelings have a reflected or secondary existence in affirmations



which are made about them or to which they give rise, and it is this intellectualised matter which is the starting-point of dogmatic theology. It has first to essay the historical task of collecting the doctrines prevalent in a particular Church at a particular time; it has further to deal with the genetic problem of tracing them to their source in the varieties of Christian feeling; it has to define them with a scientific precision that does justice to their essential content of feeling; and finally it has to articulate the surviving material into a consistent and balanced whole.<sup>1</sup>

1. The task of dogmatic theology, as viewed by Schleiermacher, involved no preliminary assumption as to the derivation of the subject-matter from revelation. The data were described as the doctrines prevalent or valid in a particular Church at a particular time. By this was meant, not so much the doctrines owned by a Church in its Creeds and Confessions—though these necessarily count—as the living and operative beliefs which are voiced in the stated preaching of the Word, in the proceedings of Church courts, and in the typical theological and devotional literature of a particular period. This procedure, it is obvious, has its difficulties. It is not easy under modern conditions to obtain a trustworthy report upon the doctrines which are really alive and doing work, and which are expressive of the detailed beliefs of a particular Church. Nor does the method seem to promise what is looked for in theology. The question which theology is expected to answer is—‘What is truth?’—and it has the appearance of an evasion to proceed to report what men are teaching for the time being in a single branch of one division

<sup>1</sup> *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1836, Bd. I., *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*; Bde. III. IV., *Der Christliche Glaube*. See App. H, *The Theological Principles of Schleiermacher*.

of Christendom. But the method of Schleiermacher does not in effect reduce the theologian to the rank of a reporter. For he lays down the condition that none may undertake to expound the doctrine of a Church unless he be in sympathy with it and share its faith; and he adds that the thinker who should attempt the task without possessing the faith which he described, would be wanting in the essential qualification for doing the work with an elementary measure of success.

2. In the second place, theology has the genetic task of tracing the doctrines prevalent in a particular Church to their original source. The primary source, as has been said, is devout feeling. Every doctrine which finds a place in the Christian system, every article at least which is entitled to a place, is an attempt to describe or interpret some form of religious feeling. It is a necessity of feeling that it should express itself in some fashion. In the lower stages of culture it seeks vent in ejaculations and gestures. At a higher stage it finds utterance in symbolical acts, and also in devotional and rhetorical speech. At the highest stage it attempts to give an account of itself, and of the objects with which it is connected, in didactic discourse, and in the clear-cut balanced statement of the dogmatic proposition.

In reflecting upon their experiences, men have been forced to reflect upon the causes by which they have been produced. And the source of the feeling of redemption is readily identified. It is matter of history and experience that the feeling is owed to Jesus Christ, who Himself was the prototype of the experience of intimate and sustained communion with God, and who has continued to reproduce it—through the agency of the Church and the means of grace—in those who are

knit to Him by faith. From this accordingly has sprung the doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ as the Mediator, by whom the blessings of redemption have been procured for believers, and also a set of doctrines concerning the Church, the means of grace, the last things and the Triune God.

3. The raw material of theology, then, is the system of doctrines prevalent in a particular Church; the source is Christian feeling pointing back to Christ; and we have next to advert to the criterion which was used in the final task of defining and systematising the doctrines. This does not take the form of an unthinking reproduction of the ecclesiastical definitions. The reproduction is done in the light of the theory that the doctrines are a reflex of pious feelings. This entails two obligations—to exclude from the system of doctrine whatever intellectual material is not traceable to a spring in pious feeling; and to re-state doctrines, if necessary, in the terms which shall make them the best possible expression and interpretation of the feelings from which they have been derived. In regard to the former of these tasks, Schleiermacher conceived that the traditional systems of doctrine, Protestant as well as Catholic, contain articles which have no root and warrant in devout feeling, but are a pure product of philosophical speculation; and he urged that when this foreign origin can be proved—as in the case of certain tenets of natural theology—the propositions are to be thrown aside as spurious and irrelevant matter. Again, he conceived that a doctrine may be rooted in feeling, while yet it is an imperfect expression of the religious datum—as in the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ—and in this case deference to the current teaching of the Church will not debar



the theologian from seeking formulas more adequate to the discharge of the scientific obligation. The conditions of this critical and scientific work ensure the operation of a principle of progress; and progress is further facilitated by sporadic movements of the living thought of a particular period, in which the theologian finds encouragement to move in advance of the general mind of the Church. On the other hand, theology gives guarantees of conservatism and of continuity. It is concerned with historical data—viz. the peculiar modifications of feeling which constitute the genius of the Christian religion, and the work of the Redeemer by which they have been engendered. A theology which like Rationalism detached itself in large measure from the history and experience of the Church, which left out doctrines with which Christian feeling was vitally bound up, and which laid all the stress upon speculative and ethical tenets that left the heart unaffected and cold, was conceived to be a scientific blunder as well as a crime against Christian piety. The orthodox tradition of theology, Catholic and Protestant, though held to be subject to revision in detail, was found to be faithful to the guidance of Christian feeling in assigning a central position to Christ, and in its laudable attempt to fix His unique and abiding significance in the doctrines of His Person and Work.

## II

The fundamental questions raised by this theological method are—first, is it a fact of psychology and history that the religious ideas of Christianity are a deposit from devout feeling? Secondly, can we accept Schleiermacher's conception of the criterion of Christian doctrine?

1. As regards the derivation of doctrine from religious feeling, it is a just observation that all emotion seeks expression, and that it compels reflection upon its own nature and upon the causes which have produced it. It is observable that an exceptional period of religious excitement is usually accompanied by an intensification of doctrinal belief, and by a realisation of previously neglected aspects of truth. Further, it is evident that a considerable portion of Christian doctrine is an attempt at the analysis and description of states of religious experience. Such are the doctrines of the nature and forms of sin, of spiritual inability, of faith and repentance, of regeneration and sanctification. But the facts are far too complex—the interaction of thought and feeling in religious experience is too clearly operative, to allow the generalisation to pass unchallenged that religious doctrines are to be estimated as a mere reflex of religious feelings. In the normal life of the Christian Church, the preponderance of evidence is greatly in favour of the priority of ideas. In the case of an individual conversion it would be generally recognised that it is the group of ideas, impressively presented as a gospel, which is the instrument that produces the change of heart, rather than that a new state of feeling supervenes which leads to the discovery of a new set of ideas. It was on the whole the same in the epochs of religious ferment and movement which have been stamped with the character of a spiritual revival or a reformation. It is undeniable that in these periods a mysterious spiritual influence was at work, which created a general temper and receptiveness that were needed to explain the extraordinary character of the effects; but on the other hand there was a spoken or written message, embodying



a group of ideas, which was the principal means by which the movement was sustained, invigorated and perpetuated. At the Reformation, in the Puritan upheaval, and in the Wesleyan revival, it is much clearer that the preaching of a gospel was a cause of the spiritual convulsion, than that the constituent ideas of this gospel were a description and interpretation of the emotional phenomena. Was it then otherwise in the two stages of origins—in the preparatory phase of the Old Testament, and in the period of the foundation of the Christian religion?

(a) Beginning with the Old Testament we ask whether it is a tenable view that the message of the prophets was a mere reflex and attempted expression of their own religious feelings. It is, of course, true that in almost every case a profound religious experience was the presupposition of the prophetic activity. In this experience they had a feeling of being apprehended by God, of undergoing a spiritual purification, and of receiving an enduement of power. It was undoubtedly a part of their message to tell what God had done for them, while their personal experiences were to some extent the occasion and condition of their being able to see more deeply than they would else have done into the heart and purpose of God. At the same time it is clear that the principal object of their reflection was, not their own feelings, but the doings of God in the history of Israel. That history consisted of a series of divine acts—of election, of righteous retribution, of unmerited mercy—which were a disclosure of the nature and the purposes of God; and the prophetic teaching was to a far less extent a reflex of their own experiences, than a proclamation of the truths thus historically disclosed, and the application of these, by way of



menace and promise, to the minds and consciences of their people.

Even if the data be extended to include the national experiences of Israel under the divine government, we do not establish the purely secondary character of the religious ideas. It is an important truth that the revelation of God to Israel was essentially a self-disclosure in history; that it is not identical with the inspiration of the sacred books; and that the Old Testament contains a large element which is properly estimated as reflection on and inference from the historical facts.<sup>1</sup> But although the revelation consisted primarily of divine acts on the field of a nation's history, we must recognise as part of it the form of divine activity which revealed God to a nation by giving to it great minds. It is, moreover, quite arbitrary to say that the influence of the Spirit of God upon the prophets made them more devout, and also more earnest, but that it did not make them wiser. The evidence is the other way. Extraordinary as is the history of Israel by reason of the impressive events by which it was guided and coloured, it is no less extraordinary by reason of the greatness of the religious thinkers who were raised up to penetrate to the meaning of these events, and who read from them for the benefit of after-ages the lessons which they suggested touching the divine being, purpose and government. The same God reigned in the history of other peoples—sending to them also prosperity and calamity—and they spelled out little, and that confusedly and uncertainly, as to the divine significance of their national discipline. The same God communed with those who in other lands feared Him and worked

<sup>1</sup> Rothe, *Zur Dogmatik*, 2 Auf. 1869.

righteousness, but they did not extract from their pious feelings a doctrine of the attributes and of the works of God which remotely compares in point of depth and moral purity with the prophetic teaching. It is, accordingly, a legitimate inference that ideas were an original and integral part of the unique self-disclosure of God in the history of Israel.

(b) In New Testament times we find ourselves in a period of intense religious feeling. But on the whole the recognition of facts and the acceptance of ideas preceded and conditioned the emotional experiences. The ecstatic states of the Corinthian Christians followed upon the reception of the Gospel as preached by St. Paul. The baptism with fire at Pentecost came upon those who had been instructed in the faith, and who believed the Gospel which was preached to them. The case of St. Paul might seem to illustrate the derivative character of ideas. His conversion and subsequent life in Christ undoubtedly contributed much to the apostle's conception and elaboration of the Gospel, so that it is not without reason that his Gospel has been described as an interpretation of his religious experience. But on closer scrutiny it is evident that in his case also there was an antecedent body of religious thought which was instrumental in his conversion, and which also gave him the clue to the interpretation of his new spiritual experiences. He was converted as the result of coming into contact with Christ, and with the ideas which had been derived from Christ, and which were testified to and circulated by the primitive Church. He added, indeed, to the stock of ideas, but he had first received at least as much as he gave. We are therefore carried back to the experience of the Founder of our faith. If we approach the question from

the point of view of His human development, it appears that the Old Testament ideas about God were an important factor in His education, and that they were also a factor in moulding and enriching His experience. For the rest, it seems clear that it was His unique knowledge of the Father which was the presupposition of the unique experiences of the inner life of Christ.

The theory that Christian doctrines were wholly a deposit from the devout feelings of Christian experience is also incompatible with the definiteness and consistency of the elements of Christian doctrine. To attempt to describe the significance of feeling is a difficult task—so elusive is the phenomenon dealt with, and so ambiguous its meaning; and if the position of matters had been that the original Christian circle merely experienced a feeling of realised harmony of soul, and was thrown on its own resources to frame a theory as to the implications, it seems certain that the resultant conceptions would have been extremely conflicting and even chaotic. When instead of this it appears that there is a very large stock of ideas which form the common intellectual possession of the Apostles and of apostolic men, the inference is warranted that the same Spirit which wrought the experiences of the converts and saints of the apostolic age also guided them in apprehending a set of truths which were explicitly or implicitly given in the revelation of God in Christ.

The improbability of the view before us may also be illustrated from the contrast presented in an analogous case. Religious sentiment is akin to æsthetic sentiment, and the latter is subject to the same law that it seeks satisfaction in self-expression, and that it prompts to reflection upon its own nature and its objects. We



should therefore have expected, if feeling be the spring of Christian doctrine, that æsthetic feeling would also have given rise to a body of doctrines responding to its varieties of manifestation, would have generated a conception of a Supreme Being dominated by interest in the beautiful and the sublime, and would have predicted a future history of the world, and pictured a heaven, in which the governing motive was the realisation and perpetuation of æsthetic ideals. That no body of doctrine exists in this field which is comparable in range and definiteness to systematic theology is not adequately explained by the fact that mankind is far less vitally interested in the beautiful than in the topics suggested by religion. It points to the conclusion that knowledge is integrally connected with religious experience as it is not connected with æsthetic experience, and that the religious mind has had data of positive knowledge to work upon instead of having merely to wrestle with the obscure problem of explaining the doctrinal implications of its feelings.

2. The next point of cardinal importance is the criterion employed by Schleiermacher to sift the mass of received doctrine, and to separate its authentic and valuable elements from those which were spurious or worthless. We have to notice first his proposal to exclude all doctrinal matter which represented a merely speculative interest. Not only did he condemn Rationalism for subjecting the Christian system to the control of a standard furnished by philosophical reflection, but he also professed the purpose of rigorously excluding all such material from the scheme of Christian doctrine. 'That the ideas of philosophy,' he writes, 'differ from those of religion in their origin and form, and that it is

arrantable to combine philosophical and dogmatic material, is the fundamental idea of my book.'<sup>1</sup>

It is now possible to hold that he was entirely right in repudiating the rationalistic principle, but that he rejected it with a rigorism which involved an unnecessary impoverishment of religious knowledge. There is a body of Christian truth with which philosophy is not entitled to tamper, any more than it is able—even if it be so minded, to involve it in discredit. The supremely valuable elements in the Christian system are derived from a specifically Christian source, and they constitute the basis and the regulative principle of the comprehensive thinking which is done in the crowning task of dogmatic theology. But it may still be true that there is knowledge derivable from other sources which is consistent with the Christian view of God and the world, and which is capable of being combined with the Christian material into a rounded whole that proves more completely satisfying to the intellectual curiosity which is a legitimate motive of theology. It is an instructive inquiry as to how much of our knowledge of divine things is derived from the revelation of God in Christ—it is indeed the all-important branch of the theological inquest—but it does not follow that, in its final exposition of ascertained religious truth, theology has to renounce the hope of utilising anything relevant from any other quarter. This would involve a consequence which Christian faith cannot accept without self-stultification—viz. that God, who is believed to be almighty and all-wise, as well as all-good, has shown no clear traces of His character and attributes in His works of creation and providence. It is not open to Christian faith to believe that God has

<sup>1</sup> *Der Christliche Glaube*, 1<sup>te</sup> Auf. °2, note b.

created and governed the world in such wise that, instead of revealing Him, it radically misrepresents Him.

Further, as dogmatic theology of every school and type expounds a doctrine of Creation, it is difficult to deny that there has been a contribution of matter, which is both extremely relevant and extremely important, in the scientific discovery of the immensity of creation, and in the hypothesis of a progressive creation set forth as a scheme of cosmic and terrestrial evolution. Similarly the doctrine of Providence, including the divine government of the world, may conceivably be supplemented in weighty particulars when the revelation of God in the general history of mankind has been carefully investigated, and the philosophy of history has attained to greater clearness as to the goal, the stages and the laws of the whole movement. It is also clear that theology has learned something, and probable that it will learn more, from the philosophical discipline of psychology. The truth is that there are only two classes who have an excuse for isolating Christian knowledge of divine things from that derived from other sources—viz. those who are agnostic in their philosophy, and those who have misgivings as to whether their faith can stand the light of day.

As regards the religious knowledge which is derived from the Christian source, it was a great merit of Schleiermacher, and a permanent contribution to dogmatic method, to have emphasised the essence of Christianity as the assured datum which serves as the criterion of revealed truth, and which dominates the details of the doctrinal system. His conception of its essential content was given in a brief definition, which has been criticised, expanded and amended by many of his successors. The value of this definition and of his



conception of Christianity as a complex of devout feelings will be more profitably discussed after we have passed in review other interpretations of the essence of Christianity. Meanwhile it is sufficient to say that the presumption is against the view which he suggests—viz. that the chief blessings brought into the world through the perfect religion were of the nature of feelings, that the condition of pleasing God lies on the emotional plane, or that the supreme test of a Christian standing is one to which the attitude of the will seems to be irrelevant.

## II

The standpoint and the method of Schleiermacher have been adopted by many modern theologians. These fall into two groups, according as they have adhered exclusively to the subjective principle, or have found that it was capable of justifying the recognition of an additional and objective authority that could be appealed to as a source and guarantee of Christian knowledge.

Of the first group the most prominent representative is Alexander Schweizer, who prefaces his exposition of the system of Christian doctrine by a clear and full discussion of the fundamental principles.<sup>1</sup> According to Schweizer, the function of dogmatics is the exposition of the faith of the evangelical Church at its present stage of development. It cannot derive its materials from the faith of the Church of a former age, and it is debarred from making statutory use of ancient creeds and confessions; while it may only utilise the Scriptures in so far as their contents have been appropriated by the believing mind of an existing Church. On the other hand necessity is laid upon Protestant theology

<sup>1</sup> *Die Christliche Glaubenslehre*, 1863, Bd. 1.

to show that it represents a sound doctrinal development—*i.e.* it must show sufficient agreement with the Scriptural testimony to justify its title to be called Christian, and sufficient agreement with the Protestant symbols and tradition to justify its title to be called evangelical. The task, now, which has been indicated—of delineating the theology of a branch of the contemporary Protestant Church—is admitted to be one which can only be accomplished with approximate accuracy, inasmuch as the dividing line between the living and the dead in the matter of doctrine is constantly changing. Besides, many different stages of religious development and enlightenment are found at the same time in the one communion. For the eventual valuation and criticism of this heterogeneous material Schweizer operates with a conception of the Christian religion as the final or perfect religion which rests upon the idea of grace, and which depends upon the revelation and mediatorship of Jesus Christ.

The task of exhibiting and systematising the beliefs which are living and operative in a definite section of the Protestant Church at a given time is one of great interest and importance; and it is no doubt useful to a particular Church to combine such an exposition with criticism based on the fundamental principles of the Christian religion. But when, as in Schweizer's system, the supernatural in Christianity is eliminated, and Christ is exhibited in strictly human dimensions, we must ask which of his principles justifies this result. If it means that this is the faith of a contemporary Swiss Church, we are entitled to much more evidence than he supplies to show that he is a trustworthy reporter as to its doctrinal beliefs. If it belongs to the critical and corrective side of his task, he has done little to show



the compatibility of his positions with the historical datum of the essence of the Christian religion.

The influence of Schleiermacher also dominates the work of the recent Parisian school, notably as represented by Auguste Sabatier.<sup>1</sup> He expresses his agreement with Schleiermacher that the religious phenomenon, and more especially the Christian phenomenon, is the subject-matter of theology, commends as the only scientific method that of observation and experiment, and explains dogmas and doctrines as the means by which 'the religious consciousness has manifested its content and explained to itself its origin and reason for being.' He also proposes to organise the system of doctrine in accordance with the analysis of a threefold religious experience which yields the ideas of the religion of nature, the religion of law, and the religion of love. 'Theology,' says Sabatier, 'can disappear only if the object of its study vanishes. And so long as the religious phenomenon of Christianity is repeated, so long it will continue to be necessary to study it, to determine its conditions, its nature, cause and significance.'<sup>2</sup> This is true; but what is open to doubt is whether the phenomenon of personal piety, which finds so fervent and beautiful expression in his own pages, would continue to be repeated if it came to be believed that religious ideas are thrown off as a by-product of the religious sentiment, and that they are mere symbols which we must beware of taking too seriously. The central idea of the book which has been quoted is that the human spirit has at length been emancipated from the principle of authority, and has become autonomous, which is explained to mean that 'the consent

<sup>1</sup> *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*, E. Tr., 1904. See also *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*, E. Tr., 1897.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.



of the mind to itself is the prime condition and foundation of all certitude.' But surely there is a tenable position intermediate between blind faith in an external authority and the repudiation of all authority. The mind may discover an authority which approves itself to it as supremely worthy of trust within a certain range of experience, and which it even feels justified in trusting when it seeks to conduct it further and deeper into a realm of spiritual truth.

In a scientific age it could not but occur independently to various thinkers that religious experiences lend themselves to investigation equally with other groups of phenomena, and that it is at least possible to describe and classify them, and to attempt to explain their origin and their meaning. It is therefore unnecessary to postulate a historical connection between Schleiermacher and the scattered voices of the English-speaking world that have pleaded for a theology which should be based, not on Scripture or on metaphysics, but on experience. The classic contribution from the psychological side is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* of Professor William James; but interesting and stimulating as James's work is, it can scarcely be said that the method has furnished materials for a theology. It would appear that the function of feeling is, not to furnish a theology, but only to make clear that application must be made in another quarter.

This latter standpoint may perhaps be best illustrated from the procedure of Frank of Erlangen in the development of his *System der Christlichen Wahrheit*.<sup>1</sup> After setting aside the earlier theories, including the old Protestant conception, Frank seeks a basis for dogmatic

<sup>1</sup> 1878, 3<sup>te</sup> Auf., 1893. The link between Schleiermacher and Frank is Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis*, 1857-60.

theology in religious experience. This he finds, in the peculiar Christian experience of regeneration, and in the certainty by which it is accompanied. It is absolutely guaranteed to be a fact—as absolutely as a man's possession or recovery of bodily health, and it is attested by feelings of satisfaction, peace and joy. From this initial certainty the mind advances to the knowledge and assurance of three classes of objects of faith. There is immediately given a knowledge of certain subjective facts which are described as immanent objects of faith—yielding a doctrine of sin, a doctrine of faith, of justification and of sanctification, and also materials towards a doctrine of the world to come. Passing to reflection on the power by which these effects have been produced, Christian faith recognises a threefold divine agency as preparing, effecting and applying redemption; and this finds its interpretation as the work of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—co-eternal and co-equal. In particular redemption rests on the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ, and it is made effective by the grace and power of the risen and glorified Christ. These are named the transcendent objects of faith. But further, God works through means, which are also objects of faith, and may be distinguished from the foregoing as transitive. They include the Church, which, like the individual Christian, is a mass of contradictions—very human as well as divine, but with this advantage over the individual, that it never dies, and that it goes on accumulating experience. With the Church is associated the Word, which contains also a human element, but is surely recognised as divine from the nature of the work which it accomplishes. Scripture is not absolutely identical

with the Word of God, nor is it inerrant. While the believer may not himself respond to all the truth which it contains, he will take it on trust out of respect for the larger consciousness of the Christian society. The third of the objects of faith of this group is the Sacraments, which however are subordinate to the Word.

The system of Frank, which had considerable vogue a generation ago, marks a considerable advance upon Schleiermacher. It starts from the datum of regeneration, which is rich and more distinctive than a state of feeling; and it makes it clear that the explication of this central fact of an authentic Christian experience yields no inconsiderable body of theological doctrine. But in the course of the exposition it becomes clear that the purely subjective point of view has been abandoned, and that on the basis of inward testimony sufficient grounds have been discovered for utilising objective sources in the testimony of Scripture and Church; and it may also be thought that more demands are made upon these recovered authorities than the witness of experience will justify.

The issue of the application of the method of Schleiermacher has thus been the discovery, either that it abides in the region of psychology with a great dubiety as to the significance of the religious feelings, or that it conducts to the discovery of an external factor which opens a door into wider realms of knowledge. The latter would appear to be the true result; and in that case the contribution does not amount to much more than was present to the minds of the Reformers, when they appealed to an inner witness, described as the *testimonium spiritus sancti*, as pointing to and corroborating an objective revelation which is attested in the Word of God.



## CHAPTER VI

### BIBLICAL ECLECTICISM

THE above title may serve to describe the theoretic basis of a number of doctrinal systems which have enriched the theological literature of the modern Lutheran Church. They are biblical in respect that they heartily accept the Protestant principle that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith and practice; and they are eclectic in respect that they consciously and deliberately select some portion of the Scriptural content as constituting the assured content of revelation, in the light of which the rest of Scripture is to be valued, and by which the ecclesiastical developments of doctrine are to be tested and controlled.

This general conception is of course widely diffused throughout modern theology, and forms a link between schools which are widely separated by still more fundamental principles. Professor Flint expresses the general modern verdict when he censures the older theology for 'labouring to shut men up to receive Christianity, along with whatever is in the Bible, in the slump, as it were, because in the Bible and guaranteed to have come from God by the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Bible.'<sup>1</sup> It may, however, be convenient to restrict the designation to those systems which, emphatically repudiating the principle of a rationalistic or a confessional theology, or of a purely subjective

<sup>1</sup> *Agnosticism*, p. 491. For a valuable study of the genesis, expansion and limits of certitude as to the Word of God, see Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 1895, ch. ix. See also Ritchie, *op. cit.*, ch. ii.

theology, profess a heartfelt loyalty to the Christian revelation and its Scriptural record, and only differ to some extent in their conception of the norm which emerges from Scripture.

As a subdivision of this class we might distinguish first a group of systems which, utilising the older conception of a material principle of theology, have fastened upon some cardinal doctrine as the core of revelation. The central organising principle has been sought, as by Kahnis, in a modified doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the person and work of Christ has also been laid at the foundation, and shown to interpenetrate as well as to sustain the whole. An important contribution in this field is the doctrinal system of Kähler,<sup>2</sup> who falls back on the doctrine of Justification by faith, and with some reason contends that this doctrine contains, implicitly or explicitly, sufficient material for a theological system as well as for the spiritual needs of man. We shall, however, confine our attention to the two types of theory which have most deeply influenced the Church in its teaching and preaching—the first the theory of the Ritschlian school, and the second the attempt to establish an intra-scriptural norm by the assertion of the exclusive authority of the teaching of Jesus.

## 1

The revival of dogmatic theology in Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century was largely due to Albrecht Ritschl, whose work acted equally as a stimulus and a challenge. It is true that the Ritschlian school can no longer be appreciated or criticised as a unity. During the last ten years of Ritschl's life

<sup>1</sup> *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Wissenschaft der Christlichen Lehre*, 1883.

differences of opinion emerged among his followers in regard to the substance of Christian doctrine, while since his death not a few theologians who are called by his name have abandoned or modified some of his most distinctive positions as regards the basis and the relations of doctrine.<sup>1</sup> At the same time there are certain leading ideas of Ritschl as to the nature and proof of Christian knowledge which are not only held by professed disciples, but which continue to influence, whether consciously or unconsciously, much of the theological thinking of the modern mind.

## I

Ritschl has nowhere handled the topic of the source and norm of doctrine in an exhaustive fashion. He declared it more useful to employ a sound method, and to commend it by its results, than to attempt an elaborate description and justification of its procedure. 'The prolegomena to Dogmatics,' he says, 'always reminds me of such processes as the mixing of colours, the spinning of thread, the raising of the curtain and so forth, and I find it more attractive to get to the actual business.' 'Those,' he writes again, 'who keep up a dance round the questions of the seat of religion, revelation, and the rest, linger in the court of the Gentiles, and hold themselves aloof from the vision of God.'<sup>2</sup> The fullest account of his attitude to Scripture is given in the introduction to the second volume of *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*. Particular points of importance, such as the relations of theology and philosophy, received fuller

<sup>1</sup> Ecke, *Die Theologische Schule A. Ritschl's*, 1897.

<sup>2</sup> O. Ritschl, *Das Leben A. Ritschl's*, Bd. II, pp. 106, 334.



treatment in the introduction to the third volume of his great monograph and in occasional essays.<sup>1</sup>

1. Ritschl occupies in principle the Protestant standpoint as to the norm of doctrine by asserting the authority of the objective revelation of God in Christ as recorded and attested in the Scriptures. In opposition to Rationalism, he held with Schleiermacher that theology is a positive science whose data are historically given, and that it is to be protected against the attempted usurpations of speculative reasoning. He agreed that the rights of theology can only be safeguarded by a severe delimitation of the provinces of theology and metaphysics. He also held with his predecessor that Christian doctrine can only be cultivated by a thinker who takes up his position as a member of the Church, and who recognises that the primary function of the theologian is to serve the Church.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand he rejected the view that the materials of theology are to be extracted from the devout feelings or the Christian consciousness. The subjective factor has indeed an important part to play in his system, but it is not as the repository of the facts and doctrines which theology has to unfold and interpret. The source is a definite historical datum,—a revelation which had Christ for its centre and goal. ‘The perfect apprehension and management of Christianity,’ he says, ‘is dependent on the condition that we recognise in the person of its founder the key to our interpretation of existence, the standard for the range and form of our moral tasks and our attitude to the world, and also the standard by which to test the justification and the validity of worship and prayer.’

<sup>1</sup> See App. I, The Principles of the Ritschlian Theology, for illustrative extracts.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, E. Tr., iii. p. 177.

These invest with the character of a special revelation even the Christian religion with its universal destination.' Furthermore, the content of this revelation reaches us through the channel of the Scriptures. 'The theology,' he says expressly, 'which aims at exhibiting the authentic intellectual content of Christianity in positive scientific form, must collect it from the books of the New Testament, and from no other source.'<sup>1</sup> His confidence in the normative value of the New Testament record is based, not on a theory of inspiration, but on the fact that the canonical books are the original documents of Christianity, and therefore the only reliable witnesses as to its specific character. Experience shows that ideas and principles are liable to change and corruption; and our best authorities for the essential content of Christianity must be the testimony of its founder, and of the writers who stood nearest to the founder, and whom He commissioned and equipped for the apostolic work.

2. The content of revelation now, while it is described as biblical in that it is furnished by Scripture, is not identical and co-extensive with Scripture. The matter of revelation is narrower than the range of narrative and instruction in the sacred books in which the writers recorded it, reflected on it, and related it to contemporary thought. It is, in brief, a central content of Scripture which is apprehended by living faith.<sup>2</sup> It is a verified view of divine things, in particular of the nature and conditions of salvation, which faith—as the counterpart of

<sup>1</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, E. Tr., iii. pp. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Scripture is regarded, not as a law—a rigid external code imposed from without on the Christian mind—but rather as a great confession of faith which we discover experimentally to be capable of awakening in us a spontaneous echo of its message of Christ Jesus the Lord.'—H. R. Mackintosh, *Expositor*, 1906, i. p. 409.



revelation and in a sense its sponsor—fastens upon in the Scriptures. It might appear, indeed, that there is matter in Scripture, supported by religious authority, which is taken over without scrutiny because of its credentials. ‘Unquestionably,’ he says, ‘that must be regarded as normative which can be shown to be the intellectual common-good of the New Testament.’ But this is not to be construed as a repentant reliance on a purely external authority. For the doctrinal matter in question is also authenticated by faith, and in this case it was additionally vouched for by the faith of the spokesmen of the primitive Church, who cannot be supposed to have erred in essential matters on which they delivered a unanimous testimony. It is otherwise in regard to doctrinal utterances which are not supported by a consensus of the primitive documents. Whether these are or are not to be taken over is a question that depends, as in the case of the Pauline doctrine of Justification by faith, on the intrinsic value of the contribution, and affords matter for argument. Within the New Testament there is a non-authoritative stratum which is ruled out on the ground that it is due to the intrusion of the rabbinical and apocalyptic thought of later Judaism. The result of the process is gathered up in a definition of Christianity, which sets the authentic elements of the original message in their proper place and perspective, and also enables us to dispose of the supplementary matter which may be irrelevant or even foreign to the purpose of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In stating what he has not found in Protestantism, Martineau accurately describes what he might have found in Ritschl. ‘We are not permitted to take our sacred literature as it is, to let what is divine in it find us out, while the rest says nothing to us and lies dead; all such selection by internal affinity is denied to us as a self-willed unbelief, a subjection, not of ourselves to Scripture, but of Scripture to ourselves.’—*Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 175.



3. To complete the account of the Ritschlian theory of Christian knowledge, it has to be observed that the content of revelation, after being apprehended in the records by the insight and tact of personal faith, undergoes a process of editing with a view to its translation into the forms of scientific theology. This of course involves as a necessary part of the process that in Dogmatics Christian truth is so expounded as to bring out its implications, and to relate it to later problems of thought and life which lay outside the purview of primitive Christianity. 'A systematic reproduction of biblical theology,' says Ritschl, 'which should be indifferent, not only to ecclesiastical doctrine, but towards the whole of church history, is an inadequate substitute for dogmatic theology.' But much more than this is implied in the Ritschlian process of editing biblical doctrine. The statement has been made, but needs considerable qualification, that for Ritschl 'the task of Dogmatics is to reproduce the utterances of Christ and His Apostles.' The data of the records of revelation have to be manipulated in the light of a theory of knowledge in general, and in particular of a theory of the nature of religious knowledge. They have also to be handled with due regard to the special nature of revelation.

(a) It has been said that Ritschl is in agreement with Schleiermacher in repudiating the claim of philosophy to dictate to Christian faith, and even in disallowing its claim to intermeddle in matters of faith. But this only refers to the ontological speculations and negations of metaphysics. It was held by Ritschl that there is one obligation under which theology must continue to lie to philosophy. It cannot do its work without a theory of knowledge, and it must therefore

at least borrow an epistemology.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes three types of epistemological theory which have been adapted, or are adaptable, to the purposes of theology. In former times theologians either operated with the unconsidered ideas of the plain man, or they adopted the Platonic conception of the nature of ultimate realities. In both cases they thought of things—from finite objects upward to the Infinite Spirit—as substances which had an existence independently of their attributes or qualities, and which could be known in this their essential being. The second stage was initiated by the critical work of Kant, who demonstrated that all which passes for knowledge is a subjectively conditioned manipulation and arrangement of the data of experience, and that it is impossible for the mind to escape from this phenomenal world and to rise to a knowledge of things in themselves. These last remain inaccessible to us, and along with them God—although we are compelled and entitled to re-claim by faith the idea of God which was lost to reason. With the general strain of Kant's thinking Ritschl was in sympathy, but he welcomed Lotze's modification of the Kantian position which toned down its agnosticism. For the formula that we know only phenomena and not things in themselves, Lotze substituted the proposition that while we are ignorant of things in themselves we know not merely appearances but the things in the appearances. Ritschl describes and accepts his theory in the form that we 'cognise the thing as the cause of its qualities operating upon us, as the end which they serve as means, as the law of their constant changes.'<sup>2</sup> The influence of this theory

<sup>1</sup> *Theologie und Metaphysik*, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. pp. 19, 20. It should be added that Stähelin makes it doubtful whether Ritschl understood Lotze, and did not get involved in self-contradiction. *Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl*, E. Tr., 1889, p. 166 ff.



upon the details of Ritschl's doctrinal system was far-reaching. Theology has made many confident affirmations about things in themselves, as they exist out of direct relation to human experience; and according to Ritschl all such statements are discredited as concerned with a region that lies beyond our control. We can have no knowledge of absolute attributes of God as distinguished from those which are manifested in relation to the world, none of an essential Trinity, and of the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the immanent sphere of the divine existence. Theology must also be warned off the region occupied by objective theories of the Atonement; and may also feel some misgiving as to whether it has any title to speak of justification, in the sense of the Reformers, as a judgment pronounced within the mind of God.

(b) Besides making use of a general theory of knowledge, theology has to pay regard to the special character of religious knowledge. Its peculiarity is described by saying that it consists, not of theoretical judgments, but of judgments of value. 'The former,' says Kaftan, 'state a fact, that this or that is or has occurred. In judgments of value, on the other hand, we appreciate some thing in respect of its worth for man, or in relation to an ideal which is presupposed as valid.'<sup>1</sup> In its possession of this character religious knowledge is akin to ethical and æsthetic judgments and is contrasted with scientific knowledge.

'The aim is not,' says Ritschl, 'as in science, to gain a disinterested theoretical knowledge of the objects of

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmatik*, 1897, p. 28. Professor Mackintosh gives the following illustration:—"Jesus Christ died upon the Cross" is a judgment of fact only; "We have redemption through His Blood" is a judgment of value or of personal conviction. It expresses what we find in the fact, the attitude we take up towards it, our appreciation of it as bearing upon our personal life.—*Expositor*, 1906, i. p. 406.



faith. What everything turns on is the personal conviction that God, Christ, the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Church, and all other religious magnitudes of Christendom, are present and operative for us with a view to accomplishing the end of our salvation.'<sup>1</sup>

(c) The conception of the nature of religious knowledge which has been defined governs the Ritschlian doctrine of revelation, and may be further illustrated by reference to this important subject. It was strongly emphasised by Ritschl that we misconceive the nature of revelation if we suppose that it involved the supernatural communication of knowledge of the theoretical kind. It consisted essentially of a declaration of the will of God to the end of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world, and to the realisation of blessings of salvation and human brotherhood. 'Revelation,' says Kaftan, 'cannot consist in a communication of doctrine.' 'The primary fact of revelation is that men are reconciled to God and accept the invitation to become members of His Kingdom, and out of these experiences there springs a knowledge of the being and of the will of God.'<sup>2</sup>

## II

The somewhat elaborate process thus sketched has naturally invited criticism at more than one stage.

1. It is somewhat surprising that a system which energetically affirms the independence of theology should incorporate a philosophical theory which is held to oblige it to carry out a drastic programme of doctrinal revision. The theory of knowledge seems to threaten

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, see especially ch. iv., 'The Doctrine of God.'

<sup>2</sup> *Dogmatik*, p. 41.

the loss of much of the wealth that had been won by the instinct, and defended by the courage, of personal faith. It cannot be pleaded that the theory in question is an assured result of philosophical thought. It cannot even be shown that its essential idea necessarily involves the limitation of knowledge for which it is made responsible. It represents a great advance upon the purely empirical theory of knowledge. To say that we know appearance but not reality is less convincing than to say that in knowing appearance we also know reality in the appearance. The theory is correct in so far as it maintains that we can have no knowledge of that which is not presented in some way to our experience, and also in so far as it maintains that phenomena are an indubitable aspect and manifestation of reality. But it is quite conceivable that a knowledge which begins with reality as manifested in phenomena may advance to the possession of a larger and richer knowledge of the reality. Our knowledge of our fellow-men is given in scattered impressions received in intercourse with them, but we have good grounds for supposing that we rise from these to a trustworthy judgment as to the staple of their personality. In the moral judgments, in particular, which we pass upon them, we suppose that we reach an ethical self which is a richer and more definite entity than is given in the fragmentary self-disclosures that are made from the same personal centre in relation to ourselves. And similarly it would seem to be a perfectly tenable position that, while God is known to us only because He comes into certain relations to us, the manifestations in those relations are such as to justify further statements as to the being and attributes of God. Again, given a starting-point in experience, it is not out of the question to

suppose, as was formerly held by all theologians, that it is possible by the aid of testimony to rise to the apprehension of truths which lie outside of immediate experience. We can make affirmations about Christ, it is admitted, so far as He comes into relation with believers by faith; but if one fact of which they have assurance is His trustworthiness, and if it can be shown that He affirmed His own pre-existence, it is not clear that they should be compelled to disbelieve Him, or declare the fact unimportant, on the ground that the affirmation transgresses against an empirical theory of knowledge by concerning itself with a mode of existence which is not directly related to ourselves.

2. The Ritschlian doctrine that religious knowledge is made up of judgments of value, involves two propositions which it is desirable to disentangle and to examine separately. One proposition relates to the special character of religious knowledge, the other to the ground on which it is accepted as real or valid knowledge.

(a) The first assertion is that the parts of religious knowledge have essentially a practical bearing. They are concerned with deliverance from evil and with the positive benefits which are the object of our religious hopes—especially with the relations of God to the world and to man which are the ground of our hope of protection and blessing. We may describe the range of this knowledge, in the homiletical equivalent of an earlier generation, by saying that it has the character of saving knowledge. And this observation is substantially true of the revealed content of the Christian religion. Theology has not been restrained, and has quite properly refused to be restrained, by what may be called a utilitarian interest. It is animated by the scientific interest to which knowledge is a good, inde-



pendently of considerations of utility; and it has pursued investigations and speculations which seek no other end than the satisfaction of the intellectual instinct which seeks to know all that may be known. Further, it cannot be admitted that the work done by religious thinking in a purely theoretical interest has been fruitless: something has been collected by theology in the way of reasoning upon the data of revelation, and much has been discovered of the purposes and methods of God from the observation of His works of Creation and Providence. On the other hand it seems to be true that the deposit of knowledge which we are justified in describing as revealed truth was limited by the requirements of a practical task. The Christian religion was planted in the world as the instrument for accomplishing a racial and individual salvation; and it would seem that the intellectual illumination which accompanied it was restricted to the measure which was necessary to make clear the nature of the Christian religion, and to make effective its saving provisions. It did not fall within its scope to make such a provision as theology would have welcomed for the full satisfaction of its intellectual curiosity, and for filling up irritating blanks in a scheme of religious philosophy.

(b) The second part of the doctrine of value-judgments is that religious knowledge rests upon a different basis from theoretical or scientific knowledge. This raises a new point, as may be seen from the analogous case of medicine. Medical knowledge has an essentially practical bearing—it is a sum of healing knowledge—and yet it is knowledge which possesses scientific quality. It might equally be true that the knowledge possessed in Christianity was essentially saving knowledge, and that

at the same time the claim could be made good that it did not differ from scientific knowledge in origin, but only differed in respect of its practical application. The ground on which the contrast is affirmed is that the judgments of fact in which the former consists rest upon observation and reasoning, and are demonstrable to man regarded as a rational being; while religious knowledge is only attainable by those who bring to it a certain receptivity and will to believe—which dispositions in fact form a large part of the evidence which gives to it its credibility. Upon this it may be observed that the contrast between the foundations of the two kinds of knowledge is not so radical as is alleged. The conception of scientific knowledge as purely disinterested is subject to some qualification; as it appears that the human mind, in its quest and organisation of knowledge, has brought a selective activity to bear upon the manifold data of the world, and has set its own stamp upon particular aspects of existence which make an appeal to it.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand it is not evident that one might not investigate religious phenomena in a purely detached spirit, arrive at the conviction that the religious and in particular the Christian view of the world is true, and yet refuse to make it in any way a personal concern. In all ages of the Church there have been many persons who have held the Christian system on purely intellectual grounds, and in their case it seems as impossible to deny that they have some real knowledge of God and of divine things, as to affirm that such knowledge rests upon a judgment of its worth for themselves. It also seems unreasonable to say that the great multitude of persons in all ages who

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl saw on thinking the matter out that no knowledge is disinterested, and according to the degree of interest evoked he distinguished between concomitant and independent value-judgments.

have received the Christian religion on the ground of authority or custom, and not because of a judgment formed by them of its value for themselves, are to be held to have had no knowledge of religious truth. At the same time it is undoubtedly a fact, when we penetrate to the foundation of the knowledge of those who, because they live by the religion, are of real account in this matter, that its truths are supported by a body of evidence which differs somewhat in quality and balance from that by which scientific truths are established. The evidence adduced has less of the character of a demonstration for the intellect, but this is compensated for—and the same applies to judgments about morality and beauty—by the greater emphasis of the welcome which is given to the message for its own sake out of the depths of the sympathetic personality.

(c) The Ritschlian doctrine of revelation, though often stated in an extreme and untenable form, is founded on a just observation. The school is extremely chary of admitting that revelation could contain an element of supernatural instruction. It brought no doctrine into the world, according to Kaftan, only an invitation to enter the Kingdom. But it is difficult to see how this invitation was intelligible, or could possibly be accepted, except on the basis of instruction about God and the nature of His Kingdom. There is a curious prejudice in the view of the relation of God and man which heartily recognises the influence of His Spirit upon the will, but regards with repugnance the idea that it should ever have illuminated and enriched the intellect. The sound observation on which the Ritschlian conception rests is that revelation is not to be treated as co-extensive with Scripture; but the limitation of the scope of revelation may not be justly carried beyond



the point already adverted to in describing it as the vehicle of a gift of saving knowledge.

The theoretical apparatus of the Ritschlian school is weighted with a number of assumptions which carry into the detailed results of the system an element of dubiety. At the same time it seems that Ritschl correctly divined the general conditions under which Protestant theology has to do its work, and that he greatly contributed to further it both by the statement of problems and by the application of his method. He is right in holding that the starting-point in theology is the revelation of God in Christ, attested in the Scriptures, and also in holding that the appropriation and interpretation of the divine content demands an activity of faith which, while nursed in the Church, is not in bondage to the statutes of the Church. The question may indeed be raised whether the faith operative in the theologians of the school has been a normal and representative Christian faith. Though the exhaustive and brilliant monographs which the school has produced on the history of doctrine amply evidence the catholicity of its doctrinal interests, there is reason to think—at least in Ritschl's case—that the power of religious sympathy and insight has not been commensurate with the learning. It remains probable that there have been other periods in the history of the Church when faith has operated with a clearer vision and with a surer tact than it showed in the closing decades of a century somewhat bewildered by its own achievements. At the same time it is an incontestable gain to the Church that a system of theology has been set in circulation which, deeply rooted in personal faith, consists of what is wholly believed, includes nothing on the mere ground that it seems to be a duty to try and

believe it, and appeals to experience as standing sponsor for the doctrines which it proclaims.

## II

In recent times one of the popular watchwords in popular theology has been 'back to Christ.' The watchword is somewhat ambiguous, but the meaning which it commonly bears is that all which Christ taught is authoritative, and that no other teacher is authoritative except in so far as anticipated or corroborated by Christ. We are invited to pass by the dogmatic decrees of the Catholic Church, and even the writings of Apostles and apostolic men collected in our Canon, and to take our stand upon the teaching of Jesus Himself as the supreme and sufficient guide. This view, there is reason to believe, is the working hypothesis of a considerable body of preachers who have been troubled by a feeling of insecurity consequent upon the work of biblical criticism, and who may also have shared in the declining sympathy with the confessional matter that was so largely derived in form and substance from St. Paul. It was fostered by the attractive writings of Professor Bruce, who did much to commend to perplexed minds the simplicity that is in Christ and in the Galilean Gospel. In his *Wesen des Christenthums*, Harnack sets aside the view that the teaching of Jesus is the exclusive Christian norm, but the main point of the book is that the Church has mingled much foreign matter with His original Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

The appeal to the teaching of Jesus as the supreme

<sup>1</sup> Of special importance is the attempt to expound and to defend this principle which has been recently made by Wendt in his *System der Christlichen Lehre*, 2 Bde., 1906-7. As a corrective of the one-sidedness see Forrest, *The Authority of Christ*, 1906. *The Christ of History and Experience*, 1901.

norm and adequate source of Christian doctrine has much to commend it. The modern Protestant theory, in the hands of the chief schools, has grown somewhat complicated—requiring many explanations and reservations; and it may not unreasonably be supposed that the sound method is more intelligible and workable. And such a method seems to be supplied in the conception that the business of theology is nothing else than to learn of Christ.

1. The arguments adduced in support of the view of the exclusively normative character of the teaching of Jesus are in the main two—that it follows from His historical and from His religious position. In the first place Christ was the founder of the Christian Church, and of its distinctive outlook upon God and the world; and it is therefore right and proper to treat His teaching as regulative of Christian faith. It is also in accordance with analogy. If the teaching of Plato be the criterion of Platonism, as would be universally admitted, it seems equally obvious that the teaching of Jesus must be the criterion of Christian doctrine. Further, it is pointed out that there is a large body of evidence that the New Testament writers regarded the teaching of Jesus as the culminating Word of God, which possessed paramount authority, and which was the source of the knowledge with which they themselves were entrusted. Many have also emphasised the argument that the unique religious position of Jesus as an object of faith carries with it the guarantee of the paramount authority of His teaching.<sup>1</sup>

The weight of those considerations it is unnecessary, and indeed impossible, to deny. It is certain that no system of thought would be entitled to be described as

<sup>1</sup> Wendt, *System der Christlichen Lehre*, Bd. 1.



Christian, or as a legitimate interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ, which was in contradiction to the principles of the religious and ethical teaching of Jesus. It is also evident that the New Testament writers recognised that they were dependent on Jesus, and that they regarded His teaching as a standard with which it was unthinkable that they should disagree. But to prove that the teaching of Jesus cannot be contradicted by thinking which calls itself Christian, does not preclude the possibility that it may have been enriched by a fuller interpretation than is given in His own words of the nature, the presuppositions and the provisions of the religion of which He was the founder and mediator.

2. (a) Coming to the details of the theory we may observe, in the first place, that as expounded by the modern theologian, it has not the merit of simplicity and workableness which has largely commended it to the popular theological mind. The method is not that of appeal to a mere *ipse dixit*. The teaching of Jesus, to which normative authority is ascribed, is found to be a central doctrine which requires to be detached from other elements that combined to form its temporary setting. This message was His Gospel, which was concerned with the advent of the Kingdom of God, the great salvation therein offered, and the conditions of membership in the Kingdom. In His intellectual equipment, on the other hand, there were elements borrowed from contemporary culture which are not supported by His authority as intelligently conceived—such as His ideas about the realm of nature, the physical constitution of man, demoniacal possession, and also His outlook upon history, and the political and economic arrangements of the world.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty

<sup>1</sup> Wendt, *ibid.*, p. 57.

accordingly still remains of extracting from the mass of our Lord's teaching the religious norm which it contains, and of determining its precise scope and content.

(b) The method of this school encounters another serious problem in the fact that there is a difficulty in drawing a line between the teaching of Jesus and that of His Apostles. If it be resolved to use the Synoptic record, as the one source of our Lord's teaching, the matter is tolerably simple. For although that record consists of a report of the sayings of Christ which had passed through the hands of the Church, the argument of Wendt is irresistible that the whole has a character of originality and of unity which leave us assured that we are dealing with a scheme of thought which bears the impress of the single mind of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The real difficulty is whether the Fourth Gospel may be drawn upon for materials. It is evident, as is perhaps indicated by the author himself, that the teaching of Jesus had received some colour and impress from the mind through which it was transmitted; and in using the discourses of Jesus therein recorded as the norm we are therefore dependent on some combination of the original message with elements of apostolic reflection.<sup>2</sup>

(c) It is an objection to the procedure of treating the teaching of Jesus as the exclusive source of Christian knowledge that it is restricted in its range, and only touches slightly on certain important matters which are an integral part of the revelation. In the nature of the case it was an incomplete record and interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ. That revelation included the self-sacrificing death of Christ and His resurrection from the dead; and while the reports of our Lord's teaching include predictive references to

<sup>1</sup> *Inhalt der Lehre Jesu*, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 26.



these events, it obviously lay outside of His purpose to make clear their full significance. 'What gives to the testimony of the immediate witnesses its special and independent importance,' says Kaftan, 'was not only the self-witness of Jesus which it transmitted, but the circumstance that the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ was only completed in His death and resurrection. It was these facts which first led to a complete understanding of His person, which furnished the knowledge of His work as a whole, and which were the occasion of the outpouring of the Spirit in the Church. For this reason, and for this reason above all, the preaching of the first witnesses of the crucified and risen Christ is a necessary and indispensable element in the historical revelation of God.'<sup>1</sup> In the life of the primitive Church it might be seen that the all-important fact of experience was communion with the glorified Lord; but it was not a subject to which prominence could naturally be given by our Lord in the discourses of His earthly ministry. It was after the event that these facts claimed a place in the foreground of Christian thinking, and that the effort was made to grasp their significance more fully than could be done on the basis of any anticipatory words of our Lord. The apostolic writings put us in a position to understand the Christian revelation, not only from the point of view of the divine intention, but also from the standpoint of the earliest results. The Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus was an instrument intended to do a particular work in the souls of sinful men. The apostolic writings of the New Testament proceeded from men in whom it had accomplished the divine purpose, and who therefore wrote in full view, not only of the estate of sin and

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmatik*, p. 39.



misery in which the Gospel found them, but also of the way in which it had won entrance into their minds, and of the nature of the power that worked in them unto salvation.<sup>1</sup>

3. A yet more decisive consideration is that it is impossible to differentiate, in point of quality and value, between the teaching of Jesus and the general body of apostolic teaching. It is true that all the books of the New Testament canon do not rank as equal in originality and in importance. Some are decidedly secondary and dependent, in relation either to the Synoptic teaching of Jesus, or to the Pauline theology. Nor, again, need it be denied that there are trains of thought in the apostolic writings which are pursued under the influence of Rabbinical culture rather than in the power of the inspiration of the Gospel. But when we have regard to these writings as a whole, and to their essential content, it cannot be doubted that they have their source in the same Spirit with which Christ was anointed above measure, any more that they contribute to a completer view of the contents and grounds of the Christian salvation. The proof is that the witness of the Holy Spirit can be cited no less confidently for a divine content of the apostolic writings than for the discourses of the Synoptic record. In particular, it is an undeniable fact of history that the power of the Christian religion has in no small degree been exerted through the Gospel of Christ as it was expounded in the Pauline Epistles, and as there more fully developed in its relations to the facts of human nature and to conflicting types of religious thought.

It seems probable that the modern mind, in so far as it has adopted the theory under discussion, has mis-

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. Introd.

taken the apologetic value of the teaching of Jesus for doctrinal finality. It has been observed, and rightly, that there is no type of New Testament teaching which makes the same appeal to the average human nature of modern times, and also to those whose minds are burdened by disturbing elements of modern culture, as the strain of simple religious teaching, combined with a pure and lofty morality, which is set forth in the Synoptic record of our Lord's discourses. There is a universality in the appeal of Jesus—speaking as it does to man as man, and not presupposing any very definite type of previous equipment or experience, which cannot be so readily affirmed of the Gospel as presented by St. Paul. To this is to be added that the message of Jesus was conveyed in a literary form that has an undying charm in comparison with the more abstract terminology which was framed by St. Paul, and which was taken over by the Protestant tradition for theological instruction. This may be true, and yet it may also be true that when our generation has hearkened to Jesus as He spake in the days of His flesh, He says to them as before: 'It is expedient for you that I go away,'<sup>1</sup> and that for a fuller knowledge of what He is, and of what He wrought, He entrusts them to the school of the apostles to whom He promised the Spirit to lead them into all the truth.

It is unquestionable that what Christianity possesses in distinction from other religions and from systems of speculative theism was comprehended in Christ. In Him we possess the self-disclosure of God which forms the distinctive element in the Christian idea of God, and also the manifestation of the ideal of human perfection on the ethical side; while from Him has flowed

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 7.

the influence which has enabled men to trust in the Father, and which has moulded them after His own loving image. But the revelation of divine and human love of which Christ was the medium was a revelation in life and love and saving act, as well as in word. It may even be said that the person, the life and the death were the greater and richer part of the revelation; and that their significance was greater than was expressed in His spoken words. It has been pointed out as characteristic of the religion which He founded that it imposes much responsibility on His followers in the way of utilising the talents which are committed to their trust; and it is only another illustration of this that much was left to the immediate disciples in the interpretation of the revelation of which He was the mediator, and in a sense the sum. In any case we are fully justified by a principle already emphasised in attaching the utmost value to the apostolic interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ. We are thrown back on the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit for the authentication of revelation and for insight into its essential features; and apart from any theory of inspiration the apostles and their fellow-workers of the primitive period may be trusted as the best equipped of all who, in dependence on the Spirit, have essayed to expound the significance of the revelation of God in Christ.



## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

IN the course of our survey we have maintained the position that Protestantism truly laid the foundations of the theory of the Rule of Faith. As regards the ultimate source of Christian knowledge it was justified in holding, as against Rationalism, that it is derived from a self-disclosure of God which differed in respect of the manner of communication, and also of its richer and more efficacious content, from the general revelation made through nature and history. As regards the repository of the Christian revelation it rightly held, as against Romanism, that the one trustworthy channel by which it has been transmitted to us is the collection of the sacred books of canonical Scripture. As regards the means of interpreting the content of the Christian revelation, it properly repudiated the idea that the truth which it contains is to be measured and regulated by an ecclesiastical or rationalistic standard, and properly affirmed that it falls to be interpreted by believing thought working upon the records in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand it cannot be said that the rival theories which have emerged in the history of the Church have been wholly misleading. They have their relative justification in that each emphasises an element of truth for which some place has to be found in a complete theory of the source

and norm of Christian knowledge. It has also become apparent in the course of the discussion that Protestant theology can no longer profess that it fully enunciates its own theory when it declares that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith and practice, and that it requires in addition to formulate and work with a definition of the essential content of revelation which it extracts from the Bible.

## I

There is none of the classic theories which, erroneous as it may be in its entirety, does not emphasise a truth which has been overlooked or neglected in some of the developments of Protestantism. The fundamental antithesis to the Christian mode of thought is exhibited by Rationalism; but there is a sense in which all theology must ultimately be rational—since it must rest on grounds which are capable of being stated and defended, and further, the faith on which so much responsibility must be laid in interpreting and appropriating the Christian revelation is none other than reason suffused by higher influences, and operating under peculiar conditions. It has also been contended—in opposition to a timorous Lutheranism which, though magnifying faith, has not faith enough to see God revealed in His universe—that human reflection on the works of creation and providence has supplied truths that deserve and require to be combined with the specially authenticated knowledge of the Christian system into a more comprehensive whole.

The elaborated Roman Catholic theory affirms historical positions which are untenable; and in particular it makes on behalf of the Roman Church, and

of its official head, a claim of infallible authority which is inherently improbable, and which has no substantial support in Scripture or in primitive usage. At the same time Rome teaches more truth on this subject than is involved in its emphatic affirmation of the reality of revelation, and in its reverent appreciation—manifestly increasing in the modern environment—of the written word as a channel of revelation. On Protestant principles we are bound to attach very great importance to the general and sustained testimony of the Christian society. For if Christian truth be recognised and apprehended under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is evident that there is no evidence so trustworthy concerning the actual testimony of the Holy Spirit as the witness borne by the Christian Church throughout its history. To a representative organ of truly catholic piety and belief the first Protestants, to judge from some of their utterances, would have been willing to bow; and a large body of modern Protestants would be willing to use the test of a genuine catholicity as a note of the Christian truth which has the corroboration of the Spirit of truth.

The School of the Spirit has contributed nothing which substantiates the claim that material additions have been made, by way of private revelations, to the knowledge of God and of divine things which came through the Christian revelation. But at one point it had a firmer grasp on Protestant principle than the second and the immediately succeeding generations of Protestantism. The tendency of the later Protestantism was to empty of its meaning the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and to construe the Christian dispensation as a deistic economy which God had initiated by the gift of a sacred volume, but which thereafter He had left to itself and to the ministry of the Book.



It was therefore no small service which was rendered in protesting that the same Spirit that worked in the Apostles works ever in the Church, not only as the Lord and Giver of life, but as the light of all minds that know the truth, and as their aid in the administration of the principles of the Gospel. For this school, erroneously as it expressed its observation, had a more correct apprehension than orthodox Protestantism of the genius of the Christian religion. It realised that Christianity is a system of doctrinal principles and ethical maxims rather than a stereotyped body of dogmatic and moral theology—that the close of the Christian revelation accordingly was the beginning of a prolonged process of arduous thinking; and the legitimacy of the task which it professed to deal with by supplementary revelation must be recognised in the form that theology is a progressive science, and especially that the elaboration of the Christian Ethic is as yet barely a half-finished task.

The School of Feeling was doomed to futility in its attempt to derive theology exclusively from a subjective source. Feeling, when it seeks to utter itself, speaks by a stammering tongue; and even when the richer and more definite datum of Christian experience is fastened on, there is room for wide difference of opinion as to its precise content and significance. What Schleiermacher was impressed by in Christian experience was in truth an important fact—it was the same fact which impressed Calvin when he studied the content of the believing mind and heart, and was aware of a joyful feeling of assurance that a divine work of reconciliation and regeneration had been wrought, and that it had been wrought by the instrument of the Word of God. The difference was that

while Calvin rightly interpreted the feeling as a finger-post pointing to the mine of revealed truth, the subjective school in its typical representatives has looked upon it as being itself the spiritual mine. It would, however, be unjust to see in the principle of Schleiermacher nothing more than a recognition and a misuse of the fact of religious feeling. His method was an achievement which has led to an enrichment of theology through the more thorough investigation of the content of religious experience. In addition, it has sobered and strengthened theology by the conviction which it has diffused in far wider circles than those which own his leadership—viz. that theology must keep more closely to experience in the handling of doctrine. It has been realised that it is the function of experience to witness, not merely to the divine origin of Scripture, but to the matter of the Christian revelation, and that it is characteristic of the indubitably authentic matter of the Christian revelation that it is attested and verified in experience.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued in these pages that it is the duty of theology to utilise all available knowledge of God and of divine things, from whatever source it may be derived; but this is not inconsistent with the position that whatever is adopted in the theological system as bearing the hall-mark of revealed truth is authenticated by the fact that in Christian experience it evokes an instinctive response of assent to, or is necessary to accomplish some important part of, the work of our religion. It may be credible,

<sup>1</sup> 'If religious truths be accepted merely on the authority of the Bible, they are not accepted by us as in themselves either really true or religious. To be apprehended and realised by us as properly religious truths we must have a living insight into their nature and significance, and a veritable spiritual experience of their influence on our hearts and lives.'—Flint, *Agnosticism*, 1903, p. 492.

as was also argued, that there are elements in the revelation whose only guarantee is that they are vouched for by Christ, while His authority is vouched for by all the forces which build up the Christian certitude. But it may at least be generally affirmed that the family likeness of the authentic elements of revelation consists in the fact that individually, as well as in their combination, they make a self-evidencing appeal to the mind which is saturated by Christian experience.

## II

It has been stated, in the second place, that a statement of the Protestant position in regard to religious authority, if it is to be candid, thorough and useful, must embrace a definition of the essential content of revelation or of the Christian religion. Candour requires such an addition, because it appears as matter of historical fact that for Protestantism the actual norm of doctrine has never been the Scriptures in their entirety, but has ever been a scheme of saving truth extracted from Scripture. For Protestantism no less than for Roman Catholicism Scripture was a *norma normata*—the difference being that the latter avowedly derived the *norma normans* from ecclesiastical tradition, while the former employed a divinely guided tact to discover it in Scripture. It is evident that circumstances have so changed since the sixteenth century that, while in that day it was information to all whom it concerned to declare that the Bible is the supreme standard, a similar declaration to-day is rather of the nature of an evasion. In the older period it was possible to hope and believe that if the Bible was acknowledged as the Rule of Faith there would be substantial agreement on



the part of competent thinkers as to the contents of the system of the Gospel. This is no longer possible. It has been made clear in three centuries of Protestant history that a large number of Churches and schools can agree to profess the supreme authority of Scripture, while yet they can unfold its contents in doctrinal systems representing almost every shade of conflict and dissonance. It is therefore now a legitimate, and even a necessary demand, that every system of theology should give an account of the conception of Christianity which governs its dogmatic use of Scripture.

The task, accordingly, to which our inquiry has led up is the attempt to define the nature, and to set forth the theoretical content, of the Christian religion. In essaying this task we fix our attention on the fact that Christianity is primarily a religion, and it is from this point of view that we have to question the Scriptural records as to its essential nature. As a religion it is an engine which has been introduced into the world to do a particular spiritual work, and it throws light upon its genius to consider it in its context as one of the religions of the world—aiming at the same general end as the other faiths which have laid a spell upon the human mind, but also wholly transcending them by the grandeur of its promises, and the effectiveness of its provisions. The Christian religion, again, has been at work in the world for centuries, sometimes doing that work with impressive thoroughness, sometimes with very meagre and disappointing results, yet always in a form in which the fundamental type was recognisable, and in which something was accomplished that was not unworthy of the intention. As a fact the great divisions of organised Christendom, and also the schools of Christian theology

which have made any deep mark on the intellectual life of Christendom, have exhibited a much larger measure of agreement than has been recognised in theological polemics alike as to the aim, the presuppositions and the provisions of the Christian religion. In the following pages we shall have frequent opportunity to note that the main features of the Christian religion, as set forth in the original sources, are reproduced in the main divisions of Christendom to an extent that constitutes a real consensus of opinion and reveals a permanence of religious type. At the same time, in the historical development there have undeniably emerged modifications of Christianity which exhibit important and deep-seated differences; and it will be necessary to define the kind and degree of those differences, and to estimate their significance whether as a legitimate development of, or a morbid departure from, the type of Christianity which is attested in Scripture in its essential purpose and provisions, and which can also be divined as struggling for clear expression throughout the course of its chequered history.<sup>1</sup>

In the second division of these lectures we shall endeavour to define the essential nature of the Christian religion with special reference to the intellectual content which it involves, and which is inseparable from its

<sup>1</sup> While for Protestant thinking the Scriptures are the classic source for the knowledge of the Christian religion, we may also hope to understand its nature better by studying it in history and at work. I am indebted to Professor Foster for a quotation from Troeltsch which admirably expresses this supplementary point of view:—

‘The essence of Christianity is a spiritual unity developing itself in the manifoldness of Christian history, a unity of which the majority is unconscious, and which is first to be apprehended by a historical abstraction. . . . Its discovery requires the employment of historical abstraction, the art of divination which takes in the whole at a glance, and at the same time the exactness and fulness of the methodically elaborated facts.’—*The Finality of the Christian Religion*, 1906, p. 301.

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equipment for doing its special work in the world. Thereafter we shall try to fix the precise nature of the modifications of Christianity which emerged in the school of patristic Orthodoxy, in Roman Catholicism and in Protestantism, and to estimate their value in relation to the original and authentic type of Christianity. In the concluding chapters we shall apply the same criterion to certain leading types of modern theology.





B.—THE SUBSTANCE OF DOCTRINE





## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

CHRISTIAN knowledge, the staple of theology, is part of the larger whole of the Christian religion. In fastening on the intellectual content of Christianity, and making it the object of reflection and speculation, theology discharges a legitimate and even necessary task; but it is a task which it only executes by making an abstraction from a realm of concrete reality in which knowledge has emerged in vital and indissoluble union with other factors and experiences of a unique spiritual economy.

When we consider Christianity as a historical phenomenon in its totality, it might seem that its nature is describable in terms of power rather than of light. It entered into history as an aggregate of spiritual forces which aimed at accomplishing, and which actually accomplished, extraordinary results of a spiritual kind. It has exhibited a remarkable combination of creative with assimilative and leavening power. On the creative side it gave men the sense of a satisfactory relation to the Divine Being, and of a relation to the universe in which everything that evoked misgiving and fear was bound to work out eventually for good; it moulded a higher type of human character; it prescribed a new mode of life in conjunction with a gift of spiritual energy to make that life possible; and it called into existence a Christian society which, even when weakened by its later divisions,

declensions and corruptions, has continued to be the chief nursery of moral enthusiasm and endeavour, and also by far the most imposing and far-reaching of the organisations directed to the promotion of the highest well-being of mankind. It has also given proof of its vitality by an assimilative power which, in the contributions which it has collected from the world for the support and enrichment of its life, is analogous to the drafts made by the body upon the material world in the service of human personality and of its spiritual life. It has also shown extraordinary pervasiveness—permeating every sphere of human activity, and making a considerable impression even in those spheres, such as the æsthetic, the economic, and the political, in which the world claims the right to speak the final and decisive word.

In view of the diffusiveness of the operation of Christianity, and of the variety and complexity of the phenomena in which it is traceable as an inspiring or moulding force, it is easy to make a mistake as to its essential meaning and purpose. It is especially difficult to do full justice to its significance if one happens to be peculiarly interested in some isolated aspect of human activity with which it has come into intimate touch. Christianity involves a body of ideas, and indeed cannot live and operate without them; and it is intelligible enough, though none the less erroneous, that those whose business is with ideas should suppose that its whole significance is that of a divine or quasi-divine philosophy, which has accomplished the signal achievement of being at once popular and profound. It takes to do with morality, and that very earnestly and effectively; and again it is natural that those whose interests are preponderantly ethical should regard it as essentially a moral code, which has profoundly stirred

human nature by reason of the instinctive response which we make to a sound and lofty ideal, and also by reason of the strength of the sanctions which it has brought into play. Others, again, impressed with the primary importance for man of the interests of the economic and political spheres, have thought that the deepest meaning of Christianity might be found to lie in its power to bring about some adjustments of mind and environment, which would mitigate the pressure of poverty and injustice, and at least pave the way for a better social and political order. But all such observations are one-sided and misleading in comparison with the commonplace observation that from time immemorial, and among all nations, there has been a recognition that man is confronted by a spiritual problem, that in all ages he has sought to solve it, and that Christianity has its place, which it occupies with sovereign dignity, as a type of the experiences and activities to which we give the name of religion. It is quite true that we cannot construe Christianity out of an abstract idea of religion,<sup>1</sup> but it is also true that we may radically misapprehend it if we fail to understand the nature of the demand that has been made throughout history by the religious heart of mankind, and if we fail to realise that Christianity is based on a recognition of the legitimacy of this demand, and has sought to meet it point by point. It is therefore a necessary preliminary to an investigation of the nature of Christianity to inquire what has been the end sought in religion, or the function which it has endeavoured to serve in the life of the individual and of the race.

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christenthums*<sup>4</sup>, 1901, p. 5. Harnack comes near missing the genius of Christianity when he says it is all comprehended in the commandments of righteousness and love, but his habitual insight into its character of a salvation soon reasserts itself.



## 1

Modern discussions of the end sought in religion have issued in a general agreement to accept as an important discovery a view which had been taught in earlier ages, and which had been held by many ordinary people who were not aware that any other account of the matter was even plausible. This is the theory that the essential and practically universal intention of religion has been to serve a practical purpose as a means of protection and blessing to man. The activities in which man engages may be roughly divided into three groups, according as they minister primarily to intellectual, æsthetic or practical needs. One group, which aims at the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, comprehends the manifold disciplines of science and philosophy. A second group addresses itself to the æsthetic side of our nature, and gratifies the taste for the beautiful by the varied charms of form, colour and melody. These are the Fine Arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry. The third division includes those activities which minister to the satisfaction of the numerous practical wants of mankind. They primarily seek, not truth or beauty, but utility. They are illustrated in the whole range of the industries that are devoted to the support and enrichment of human life, in the technical applications of science, and in the labours of the professions which undertake the higher forms of the service of man.

When, now, we inquire as to the end of religion, it is manifest that it has most affinity with the third group. It has been classed with the theoretical, on the ground that it completes the edifice of human knowledge by making known the first

cause and the final cause of the universe, but though religion involves an element of transcendental knowledge, it can no more be shown that it originated in reasoning than that it recognises in knowledge its most precious possession.<sup>1</sup> It has also been connected with the æsthetic group of activities, chiefly on the ground that the religious sentiment has something in common with the feeling evoked by the contemplation of the beauties and sublimities of nature, or of the creations of artistic genius. But the two are sufficiently differentiated by the fact that the products of the Fine Arts have power to please even when the subjects are known to be fictitious, while nothing is less easy to tolerate than a religion which is known to be false. While it undoubtedly contains elements that make a strong appeal to the intellectual and æsthetic sides of human nature, the central purpose of religion connects it with those activities and provisions which serve a more narrowly practical purpose by doing work for the protection of man, and for the amelioration of his lot. Many sciences have branched off from religion, just as many have branched off from medicine; but religion as such, equally with medicine, has ever been animated and governed by the conviction that the knowledge which it possessed was held to be administered and applied as a means of blessing to mankind. This truth has at times been hid from the wise and prudent, but it was ever revealed even to babes in religion. It is the universal belief of heathenism that religion is at least profitable, and in this it is at one with universal Christendom, which has expressed its mind on the point in describing Christ as the Saviour, and His Gospel as a salvation.

<sup>1</sup> A good classification and discussion of the types of theory are given by F. Nitzsch, *Evangelische Dogmatik*, 1896.

It may also be observed that a religious crisis takes place whenever it is found that a religion does not accomplish the results which it was previously relied on to secure. When in a Chinese village the adoption of a new idol does not end the drought, or when in our western world an earthquake or a railway disaster is traced to forces which God does not seem to have in hand, it is a natural instinct of human nature to turn aside either to a new or to an unknowable God.

It is not asserted that it is an exhaustive account of the end of religion to say that in it man seeks protection and blessing for himself. In the parallel case of friendship, as Cicero pointed out, it cannot be affirmed that the governing motive is the consideration of the advantages to be derived from the formation of friendly ties. The motive is rather to be found in the affection felt for another, and in the sense of the duties which we owe to those whom we have come to love.<sup>1</sup> Similarly we may trace throughout the history of religion a sense of duty mingled with love which lays constraint upon men to render worship or whatever else is regarded as acceptable service. In the religions of the lower culture the altruistic motive is verifiable in certain classes of gifts and sacrifices to ancestral spirits; while in Christianity it is a common form of speech that religious acts are performed, apart from any self-regarding thought, for the glory of God. This complementary fact is well vouched for, and disposes of the charge that in religion man has merely thought of using God as an instrument for the safeguarding of his own interests. At the same time it is also undeniable that through religion man has never ceased to expect great blessings for

<sup>1</sup> *De Amicitia*, vii. viii.



himself and for his people. Can we state more precisely what he has looked for in religion, and by what means, and on what terms, he has hoped to secure its blessings?

## II

At first sight it might appear impossible to frame a formula which will cover the numerous and widely varying conceptions that have been entertained as to the practical purpose which religion pursues. And yet amid all the diversity it is possible to trace a constant conviction of the religious mind. At every stage man has had an idea of well-being which comprehended his highest conceptions of the good, and he has looked on religion as the means by which he was to attain it, and to be secured in its possession. The function attributed to religion was, in brief, to procure for him, and to secure to him, the chief good of existence. The second element in the religious idea is that this good is to be realised through union and communion with a power conceived to be strong enough to accord the needed protection and help. The conception of this power—whether many or one, and of its nature and attributes—has exhibited the widest variations, but the general testimony of religious history has at least been unwavering in its postulate of a divine being that was able to control the world, and that was master of the course of events. The third constant element is that certain requirements are made, the fulfilment of which is the condition of enjoying communion with the divine being, and of thus obtaining the protection and the blessings which make up the sovereign good. In brief, there is a body of convictions which may be said to form the higher unity of religious history, and which include these three beliefs—that there is a chief

good for man which is attainable, that its attainment is possible through the help of a divine power, and that this help is granted on fulfilment of the terms that are agreeable to the divine will. Let us now proceed to consider how Christianity realises these essential elements of a religion, and also how in realising them it presupposes and operates with a scheme of ideas which contribute the essential materials of a Christian theology.<sup>1</sup>

i. The conception of the blessings which are made available for man in the Christian religion rests upon the presupposition that the human lot is a conjunction of extraordinary dignity with extraordinary distress, and is contrasted with the idea of the chief good embodied in other religions by its spirituality and comprehensiveness.

History discloses an ascending scale of ideas as to the constituent elements of man's chief end which is reached and safeguarded by means of religion. On the lowest heathen plane man values himself as a being of the natural order—made only a little higher than the animals, and sometimes worshipping and devouring the animals as embodying or representing the highest power and wisdom. At this stage religion is chiefly directed to ensure the well-being of a tribe by winning material blessings—as favourable weather, increase of the flock, good luck in hunting, victory in battle, the preservation and recovery of health, and a numerous progeny of sons. The great religions of India mark a striking advance upon this stage, while they also exhibit the one-sidedness which is natural in the first assertion of a momentous truth. Man is known to belong to the realm of spirit, and to be akin to the principle which sustains, penetrates and environs the world of sense.

<sup>1</sup> The following exposition was somewhat closely reproduced in an address given at the World Missionary Conference, 1910.—*Reports*, vol. ix. p. 156 ff.

Material goods are despised as belonging to a realm of illusion, and peace is sought in a redemption which is wrought out within the individual soul. But the spiritual elevation of Brahminism and Buddhism is accompanied and marred by two grave defects. In their disparagement of the natural blessings and tasks of human life they do despite to the legitimate demands of human nature as well as to the rationality of the order of things. Above all, in so far as they lay at their foundation a pessimistic estimate of existence, and encourage the conception that the best to be looked for by the individual is to pass out of conscious existence by absorption in the Infinite, they involve the negation of the central idea of religious history—that life exists to be conserved, and to be filled out by religion with the greatest positive blessings.

The two religions which rank for Christian faith as specially revealed are founded on the same presupposition as to the dignity and spiritual distress of man, and they include the same elements of blessing, although with a difference of proportion and emphasis.

(1) In the preparatory stage of the Christian religion, represented by the religion of the Old Testament, we already find two presuppositions as to the nature and condition of man which prepare the way for the promise of a superlative salvation. The first is that man is a being of sovereign dignity, made in the image and bearing the likeness of the Highest.<sup>1</sup> As such he must be thought to be capable of, and destined to, the enjoyment of blessings that gather up every known and proved element of good, and which also include such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man. The second article of the preliminary doctrine was that the natural and

<sup>1</sup> Gen. i. 26-7.



existing condition of mankind is one of great spiritual misery and danger—that it lies under the dominion of the power of sin, which is the chiefest of the evils that darken the human lot, which is in a sense the only true evil, and which brings untold sorrows and menaces in its train.<sup>1</sup> A religion grappling with the problem from these premises could not but appear with the character of a great salvation; and in Christianity especially, which realises them with fresh depth and intensity,<sup>2</sup> the capital problem is conceived to be the disclosure of provisions for annulling the guilt and for breaking the power of sin. It may be added that the truths of the unique dignity and the spiritual distress of man, which underlie the whole Christian system, and to which the records of revelation bear unanimous and sustained testimony, are not bound up, save in the Pauline scheme of thought, with an account of the precise conditions under which man has reached the strange conjunction of his greatness and misery.

(2) The religious blessings are conceived alike in the Old and New Testaments in respect that they promise blessings both of the natural and of the spiritual order, and that they promise them both to the individual and to the race. There is, however, a marked difference of proportion; and the distinctive feature of Christianity is that, while comprehending the point of view of the Old Testament, it lays the main emphasis on the spiritual nature of the blessings and on their destination to individuals.

In the religion of Israel devout thinking was largely concerned with the nation, with the way of its deliverance from the power of its enemies, and with the conditions of its future security and well-being. It is true that the outlook of some sages and saints was in this

<sup>1</sup> Ps. li. 5; Is. liii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i., ii., vii. 18 ff.

particular much wider. It is an exaggeration to say, as is sometimes said, that in the Old Testament only the nation with its kings and great men counted in the eyes of God. Those who composed the patriarchal narratives and the later histories knew that God takes to do even with inconsiderable persons and with minute concerns; and in many of the Psalms it is clearly the voice of personal piety, and not merely of a national consciousness, which makes its contrite and plaintive appeal to God. But it is still true that there is a certain timidity about claiming for the individual any considerable immediate gift of divine blessing. The general conception is that God deals with the nation in the mass, and that individuals indirectly become partakers of the blessing when the nation as a whole enjoys the divine favour. This view is confirmed by the observation that although the prophets taught a doctrine of God which fully justified belief in individual immortality, it was only at a late date that the inference was drawn and became a recognised article of the Jewish creed. Again, there are very unworldly elements included in the hope of national blessings. The prophetic hope gave a prominent place to blessings which were spiritual and which involved at least as much of responsibility as of privilege—a purified worship, immediate knowledge of God, the enforcement of His law, the mission of Israel to lead the nations to the worship and service of the true God. At the same time it is undeniable that the prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God was very largely of a political cast, with the programme and promise of an ideal political and social order, and of a large development of material power and prosperity.

In the Christian religion the promised blessings are

pre-eminently individual in destination and spiritual in character, while yet they take account of the other aspirations which have been mirrored in religious history. The individual soul, to begin with, is estimated as of immeasurable value, and is represented as an immediate object of the divine love and care.<sup>1</sup> Men are not dealt with in the mass, but the Gospel makes its way by an appeal to individuals, and through their personal acceptance of the offered boons. The spiritual blessings, while described in various aspects, are resolvable into three, which are of rich content and far-reaching result. The first and fundamental benefit is a relationship to God similar to the relation of father and son, involving on the side of God love, help and protection, on the side of man trust and obedience, and which is carried on in the form of personal communion.<sup>2</sup> In view of the universal fact of sin, the paternal relationship of God comes to expression in the form of the forgiveness of sin, the primary significance of which is that God admits the sinner to the same privileges of filial communion and blessing which he would have enjoyed had he escaped the pollution of sin, but which also involves the remission of all penalties entailed by sinful acts and habitudes.<sup>3</sup> The second of the individual benefits—separable in thought, though not in experience, from the first—is the formation of a character which gradually attains to the height of moral perfection. Two stages are recognised in this spiritual process—an initial stage of conversion or regeneration, and a stage of growth and upbuilding described as sanctification.<sup>4</sup> In Christ there came into the world the pattern of a higher and holier humanity, and the New Testament gives

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vii. 7 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vi. 14; Rom. v. 1 ff.

<sup>4</sup> John iii. 3; Eph. iv. 13.



expression to the conviction, which is uttered wherever the Christian religion is met with in purity and power, that from Him also proceeds a Spirit of power which can effect a new creation, and enable man, in spite of clinging weakness and repeated backslidings, to advance surely towards the spiritual goal. The third of the boons is the gift of eternal life,<sup>1</sup> which is conceived as a life both of divine quality and of endless duration. Specially noticeable is the spirituality of the rendering of the idea of immortality—the blessedness of heaven being made mainly to consist in the vision of God and the fellowship of Christ, and in the attainment of that perfection of which here we have an earnest in our best hours of aspiration and endeavour.

To all this there is an important supplement. There is, to begin with, an element of natural blessings which is included in the Christian conception of the sovereign good which is realised in religion. Christ taught His disciples to trust God for food and raiment, and for providential protection amid the dangers and privations of the world.<sup>2</sup> In particular, there can be no doubt that part of the impression which the evangelists designed to make was that the healing of those that were sick in body and mind was an important part of the mission of the Saviour, and that it would be perpetuated and even extended in the labours of the later generations. There is also to be considered the pregnant Pauline saying, ‘All things are yours.’<sup>3</sup> And again, Christianity had the design to bless the race as a whole. It includes the promise, not only of individual salvation, but of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. According to a

<sup>1</sup> John v. 24 ; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18 ; 1 Peter i. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 25 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 21.

recent reading of the Gospels, indeed, it is held that the Kingdom of God which Jesus contemplated was detached from the soil of this world, and from organic connection with the historical development of the race, and was relegated to a heavenly sphere, where it would come into existence after the cataclysmic ruin of our earth. This interpretation, however, is only reached by ignoring a considerable body of the sayings and parables of Jesus which have an excellent title to be regarded as authentic; while in the apostolic writings room is certainly made for the conception of a development of the Kingdom within the world, both by the Pauline references to the Roman Empire,<sup>1</sup> and by the principles of the theology of the Fourth Gospel. In any case we are justified by the implications of Christian faith, and also by the providential commentary which has been added in the later history of the world, in accepting the view that the Kingdom of God promised in the Gospel was designed to interpenetrate the nations, to knit them together in the bonds of faith and love, and to serve at once as the gathering-ground and the inspiration of all that is known as truth and righteousness.

ii. The Christian religion contains a doctrine of God which perfectly meets the demand of the religious instinct of mankind. By the idea of God in the perfect religion two conditions must be fulfilled—one that He has the power, and the other that He has the will, to respond to man's cry for protection and blessing. The defect of polytheistic and dualistic systems is that there is no assurance that the being whom man worships has the power to help, as He may be too weak to cope with the forces of the world, or may be prevented by another divine being who is

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii. 4; 2 Thess. ii. 1-10.

stronger than He. Pantheistic systems, which rob God of personality, involve the desolating consequence that He has neither the personal knowledge nor the loving will which will guide for our good His infinite power. In the Christian religion the necessary elements are asserted with the note of absolute assurance. On the one hand He is greater than the world, for He is its creator and governor; mightier than sin, for it exists only by His permission; stronger than death, for it is His ordinance; and as He is infinite in wisdom as well as in power, He is able to deliver us from all threatening evil, and to bestow upon us all true and lasting good.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand He, while infinite God, regards us with more than the tenderness and pity seen in a human heart which is filled with holy love.

The Christian doctrine of God combines the idea of the infinite might and wisdom which are suggested by the immensity and the order of creation, and by the utmost sweep of human reason, with that of the manifestation of perfect holiness and self-sacrificing love which was given in the person and life of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Manifestly there can be no higher reach of the idea of God than that which ensures that the infinite wisdom and power are wielded by the Father who was interpreted by Christ, who feels as He felt towards men in their sins and sorrows, cherishes the same saving purpose which He pursued towards individual men and women, and seeks by the same individualising love and care to lead them, to teach them, and to perfect them. To this has to be added that the same God who was incarnate in Christ is conceived as pouring into the souls of those who believe His own divine life<sup>3</sup>—evidencing His power by

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 35 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 20; John i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 9; Gal. v. 22 ff.



making all things new, His wisdom by making even the evil to work for good to those that love Him, His holiness by the nature of the end which He pursues, His love by the greatness and the unmerited quality of His gifts.

It would thus appear that the irreducible minimum of theology which is needed to enable the Christian religion to do its work must be cast in Trinitarian form. It cannot include less than that God, infinite in might and wisdom, was uniquely revealed in Christ, and that He gives to believers to possess, in their inward experience, 'His very self and essence all divine.' But it was felt by the primitive Church that fuller and more precise definitions were needed to make the Christian salvation effective, and as we shall see it was this conviction that carried forward the development of the catholic doctrine of the Trinity.

iii. The third element of religion, we have seen, is what may be called its saving theory—the account that it gives of the conditions on which man procures the friendship and protection of God. The way is paved for the Christian theory by the two articles of its doctrine of man. His dignity, with which he is clothed as made in the image of God, shows him to be capable of salvation and communion with God. His distress which follows from the dominion of sin proves his need of salvation. And the fundamental religious problem is, On what terms can such a being be admitted to the favour of God?

The question is one to which every religion essays some sort of answer, and we may set forth the Christian answer by way of contrast to the two other theories which have made upon religious history their deep impression. The first is the theory of ceremonialism,

which has been the soul of many religions, and has exercised an influence upon all. It was the characteristic pagan theory, which moved the Old Testament prophets to indignation or scorn, and it has constantly reappeared in decadent periods of the Christian Church. Its underlying idea is that the way to please the divine being, and to have Him on our side, is to render Him honour, whether by making Him gifts, wearing a badge of some kind, or engaging in acts of external homage. The popularity of this conception is due to the fact that the universal religious consciousness recognises that God requires something at our hand, and ceremonialism points out the easiest possible way. The second theory was that which St. Paul declared to be embodied in the legal dispensation of the Old Testament, and which has been revived in the Christian Church at various times in the view that the essence of true religion is morality. It rests on the conception that God is our master, who has imposed upon us a code of moral laws, and entrusted us with various tasks, and that the way to His favour is to be found in obedience to His commandments, and in fidelity to our appointed vocation.<sup>1</sup> And certainly to say that God treats us and will treat us exactly as we have deserved is no unworthy conception of God and of His relation to man. It is moreover an equitable, common-sense doctrine, and seemingly effectual as appealing to enlightened self-interest, and putting a useful premium upon purity and righteousness of life. Among other objections to it are these—that in view of the deep-rooted and universal fact of sin no man can possibly attain to the sense of satisfying God, and that in the case of those who have sold themselves to sin for a long season, the outlook must

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 10-12.

be altogether dark and desperate. The Christian religion now is distinguished by two principles which are superficially inconsistent, which are not easily accorded their due proportion and perspective, and which have as a fact proved so difficult of adjustment that they are partly responsible for the quarrel of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. These are the principle of grace and the ethical principle. It might be said that the most distinctive feature of Christianity is the principle of grace which underlies and pervades the whole religion,<sup>1</sup> were it not that its claim is equally well established to be the supremely ethical religion in respect of the loftiness of its ideal, and the value of its ethical results.<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental position of grace in the Christian system is unquestionable. In its primary significance it means unmerited favour, in its secondary a supernatural gift of a spiritual kind, and in each form it is an element of the Christian economy of salvation. This is set forth as a saving dispensation which had its origin in the love of God, whom the enmity of the human race might rather have provoked to judgment and destruction. The ground of our salvation, in particular, was declared to be laid in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ, in the sacrifice which He offered on our behalf, and in the ministries of His heavenly priesthood. But especially the blessings are conveyed on gracious conditions. The conditions which are laid down in the teaching of Jesus, and which are repeated in the apostolic writings, are repentance and faith—an inward and heart-felt breach with sin, and a childlike trust in the forgiving mercy of God. In the practice, as well as in the teaching of Jesus, the love of God appears as a generosity which anticipates merit and survives demerit. And the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 20, 48; Rom. vi. 1 ff.



spirit of the Gospel of Jesus is reproduced by St. Paul in his own way when he says, 'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.'<sup>1</sup> So clearly is it written in the original records, and so deeply was it engraven on the mind of the Church, that Christianity is the religion of divine magnanimity, that it was found impossible for any considerable section of the Church ever to do more than covertly limit and qualify the principle.

In the Christian scheme of a gracious salvation, as has been said, the atoning work of Christ appears as an example of the grace of God, and as the ground on which He meets us on the footing of grace. The conviction that God receives us to mercy and favour for Christ's sake is an original and abiding element of the Christian religion; and the purpose of theories of the Atonement has been to strengthen the assurance of the possession of forgiveness by the attempt to understand how the necessity arose for the sacrifice of Christ, and how His sacrifice availed to satisfy the demand.

The religion of grace has also worked most deliberately and effectually for ethical results. It is associated with a provision which alone seems adequate to the purpose of producing the type of perfect character at which it aims, and of sustaining it in all virtuous and holy endeavour. This is the provision of grace in its secondary sense of a supernatural gift of spiritual power. In view of the actual condition of human nature—with sinful tendencies strongly entrenched within it, prone to sin even against the light—the only adequate remedy may well be thought to be that a renewal and reinforcement of the divine image in man should take place through the act of God

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 8.

Himself. At two stages of Christian experience this has its confirmation. One is the sudden conversion, with its classic witness in St. Paul, who declared that, when he was a stiff-necked rebel and blasphemer, God arrested his course, revealed His Son in him, and thenceforward enabled him to do all things through Christ strengthening him. In the average Christian experience, when it has not supervened on a phase of infidelity or shame, divine grace is usually realised as an influence which has throughout enveloped and fertilised the inner life, and which if intermittent in its action has also been the gift of a faithful God. The chiefest certainty is that, in answer to prayer, a grace is given which brings light in perplexity, comfort in sorrow, and strength to deal with life's temptations and tasks.

But the ethical system of Christianity has a natural as well as a supernatural side. It creates motives of a kind that make a powerful appeal to the will, and which effectually dispose it to seek after perfection. These motives have had a varying degree of emphasis placed upon them at different times.

1. It has frequently been held that the motive-power of Christianity springs chiefly from its emphatic proclamation of the doctrine of future retribution. The mediæval Church wielded an extraordinary influence over its members by reason of the lurid colours in which it depicted the torments of Purgatory, and because of its conditional undertaking to abridge their duration and mitigate their severity. The apologists of the eighteenth century, who laboured to establish the superiority of Christianity to the so-called religion of nature, rested a large part of their case upon the contention that Christianity had converted into a certainty what was previously only a surmise—viz.

the survival of death by the soul, and the existence of a future dispensation of rewards and punishments. In recent times less reliance has been placed on this as a source of persuasion, and for several reasons. Apart from the note of uncertainty which has crept into the eschatological teaching of the Church, there has been a growing feeling that the appeal of enlightened self-interest is not in harmony with the genius of the Christian religion, and is rather a survival from the Old Testament conception of the relations of God and man. Further, it is doubtful if the most realising sense of heaven and hell ever went very far in the way of inspiring noble character and stimulating to noble action. The effects of the belief were negative rather than positive: like criminal legislation and the machinery of the police courts, it might so far serve to restrain wickedness, but it could not set the soul aflame with the Christian enthusiasm. St. Paul, no doubt, relied on the terror of the Lord wherewith to persuade men,<sup>1</sup> and besought them to flee from the wrath to come; but it was matter of experience that, though they might enter on the Christian life because of a great fear, they would advance in it because of a greater love.<sup>2</sup>

2. According to another view the predominant motive supplied by the Christian system to noble living is, not hope or fear, but gratitude. This was certainly prominent in the teaching of Jesus. In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, it is supposed that the gratitude of a debtor will be proportional to the magnitude of the debt which has been remitted; and the argument is that as the magnitude of the sinner's debt is immeasurable, so should be his response in the form of

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John iv. 18.



obedience to the forgiving mercy of God.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, St. Paul, after enumerating the mercies bestowed by God in His grace, builds thereon a plea for presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God—our reasonable service.<sup>2</sup>

3. For our own generation the motive power of Christianity seems largely to lie in the spell that is cast by the person and character of Jesus Christ. It seems true that the vision of heaven and hell is less operative than of old in ordinary thinking, and it is probable that the sense of guilt has become less general, in any case less overwhelming, and that therefore there is a lessened appreciation of the boon of forgiveness. But what is certain is that the sense of the degradation of sin was never stronger, nor the desire to escape from its power. And at this point the moral aspiration finds succour and strengthening in the conception of Christ as Master and Leader in the life of noble endeavour. There is that within us all which finds its desire voiced in the demand of Israel in the days of old, for a King who should rule over us. The goodness of a cause is not enough; it needs a leader who will stand to its adherents and to the world as its symbol and champion, and who, by firing the imagination, engaging the affections, and arousing enthusiasm will generate the power that will carry it onward to victory. And in the fact that Christianity not only proposes a sublime moral ideal, but that the ideal is embodied in the person and life of Jesus Christ, who draws human souls to Himself by the matchless beauty of His character, and who inspires them with sentiments of adoration and love and trust—in this we find a deep and abiding source of the power which builds up

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 23 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xii. 1.

Christian character, and which manifests itself in a purity, a righteousness and a beneficence in accordance with the mind of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### III

The result of this analysis is in the first place to make clear that the Christian religion embodies and implies a number of most important affirmations of a theoretical or doctrinal kind. There are versions of Christianity current in the world and in the schools which represent it as being in its essence a merely ethical or æsthetic quantity, which makes no real demand upon the intellect for understanding and assent. As a fact it is inseparably interwoven with beliefs which are of wide range and of transcendent importance, and which come into irreconcilable conflict with other ideas that, in the name of speculative wisdom, have claimed to dominate the work of the human mind. It presupposes that the natural condition of man is one of sin and misery, due to alienation from God; and it thus comes into collision with the superficial optimism which only perceives the divinity of man, and ignores the disposition of the animal and the rebel. It teaches that there is a chief good to which man is

<sup>1</sup> We may gather up what has been said into a definition of the kind which has often been attempted in modern theology. Christianity is a religion sharing with others the ethical, monotheistic and universal notes, and pre-eminently distinguished by the evangelical note, in which (1) there are designed to mankind the individual blessings of forgiveness, perfection and eternal life, and the racial blessing of the Kingdom of God; (2) which guarantees these blessings by a doctrine of God as Almighty, All-wise and All-good, who has been revealed in the person and work of Christ and in the Holy Ghost as the principle of the spiritual life of His Church; and (3) which conveys the promised blessings on the condition of faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and achieves moral perfection through the constraining and enabling power of divine grace, and of the motives of gratitude and love.

destined, that it includes all which has been revealed in human character of moral nobility, and all which has been known in human experience of well-being and joy, and that once attained it will be held as an abiding possession, by the help of God, in defiance of change and death. In so teaching, it clashes with the pessimistic estimate of life which has governed the thought of ancient and modern philosophical schools, and which also underlies some of the great religions of the world. It is vitally implied in it that God is a Personal Being—not an impersonal Spirit, but a self-conscious and ethical Being: and if this be true, it is not only the most momentous truth which has come within human ken, but it convicts some of the most imposing structures of human thought of having a falsehood for their foundation or their core. It further construes God in terms of Jesus Christ—asserting what, if true, must be the most momentous fact of history—that God was revealed in the fulness of His moral perfections in One who was found in fashion as a man. It also stands for a belief which, if true, must constitute the most important fact known to us about human nature, that during the bygone centuries, and even now, the very life of God has been pouring into the lives of men, and flooding receptive souls with a light and a power that are a preparation for, and an earnest of, immortality. And finally, it is obviously a truth of the most stupendous importance which is conveyed to us in the Christian religion, and which at all events cannot be detached from it without reducing the system to comparative emptiness and futility, that we are acquainted with the conditions upon which sinful man can enter into the divine alliance in which he is delivered from all evil and secured in the enduring possession of the highest blessings. There is a real dis-



inction between religion as a mode of life and theology as a scheme of thought, but it is abundantly clear that the Christian religion not only involves, but lives by taking for granted, a somewhat elaborate theology.

It is to be observed next that the ideas referred to, which make up the Christian view of God and of human life and destiny, have possessed in virtue of their religious setting a character of guaranteed knowledge. In view of what was said of the end or function of religion as seeking to accomplish a practical result, the most relevant question to raise as to the Christian religion must be, Does it do the work which it professes, and confer the blessings which it promises? It holds of religion, as of a course of medical treatment, that the really apposite inquiry is, Did it prove an effective remedy for the malady? Upon this point the best judges are those who, accepting the Christian diagnosis of the spiritual conditions of man, have made trial of the remedy. And this, at least, is not open to doubt, that the undertaking of Christianity to protect and bless by the communication of the highest blessings has been largely made good. There are, of course, promises that remain in a realm of hope—those which remain for fulfilment in a future world—but it is matter of observation that, when put to the proof, it has been found to give an assurance of reconciliation to God, and to bring into experience a spiritual health and a moral energy of a unique kind. And if this religion, so far as it could be tested, has brought healing and health, the only natural inference is that it rests upon clear facts of the universe and operates through the application of truths. No more than the patient, suffering from ills of the body and experiencing a cure could be a medical sceptic, could those who attained to union with God and newness of

life through the Gospel, doubt that the diagnosis was just, and that the ideas on which the treatment was based were in accordance with reality.

It is further important to notice that there is a much larger consensus of opinion than is commonly supposed in the great divisions of the Christian Church as to the essence of Christianity. The organised Christian society, as distinguished from individual thinking, has never lost its grasp of the truth that Christianity is a religion—not a mere system of ideas, or a system of moral instruction, or a method of refined æsthetic enjoyment—and that as the perfect religion it is the vehicle of a great deliverance and of a splendid and enduring inheritance. As to the blessings of the Christian salvation, there is a far larger measure of agreement than of disagreement in the testimony of the various sections of the Christian Church. On the all-important question for religion—the idea of God, and the attributes and works of God—there is absolute agreement; while the Trinitarian formulation of the doctrines of God, as framed by the patristic Church, is the common good of the Creeds and Confessions, and when challenged by schools of modern Protestant thought, it has commonly been in the interest, not of a Unitarianism, but of a Sabellian type of Trinitarian thought. On the question of the theory of salvation there is indeed sharp collision, especially between Roman Catholic and Protestant thought; but both are agreed that the theory must embody the idea of grace and issue in morality; and the controversy mainly turns on the question as to which of the alternative theories does most justice to the idea of grace, and most adequately safeguards the interests of the moral life.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORTHODOX INTERPRETATION

THE value of a religion depends on the truth and sufficiency of its idea of God. For in religion appeal is made to the Divine Being as the author and the guarantor of the blessings that man needs; and if any defect of power, of wisdom, or of goodwill be imputed to God, the essential condition is wanting for achieving the desired end. It was, therefore, with a sound instinct that the Christian Church, in the first period of its history, devoted its thinking mainly to the elucidation and consolidation of its knowledge of God. It was a task which entailed centuries of controversy, for the problem was a difficult and complicated one. The hard problem for theology was to combine the doctrine of an ethical monotheism, which it took over from the Old Testament, with the new matter that was given in the mediatorial work and the Divine Sonship of Christ, and in the economy of the Holy Spirit.

It is unwarrantable to speak of the work of the primitive Church in the elaboration of dogma as if it were due to speculative audacity and overweening gnosticism. It would be nearer the mark to say that the Church found itself in possession of an inheritance of guaranteed religious ideas which laid a compulsion upon the intellect to seek greater clearness and consistency by means of dogmatic definition. It had ideas



which were involved in some ambiguity, such as the conception of Christ as a Divine Being and of the Holy Spirit as belonging to the sphere of Godhead. There were, moreover, elements of its faith which were a challenge to reason in view of their apparent incompatibility—especially the synthesis of the unity of God and the Divinity of Christ, and the conception of Christ as at once divine and human; and these created a demand that they should either be brought into consistency by a process of elimination or combined in a better form of interpretation. But as we follow the controversies, intricate and long-drawn as they were, we have evidence that the dominant interest was not to know or to speculate for the sake of knowing and speculating, but rather to proscribe modes of thought which were felt to affect the foundations of the Christian salvation, and to define the truth in the way which was felt most effectively to support and ensure the blessings of redemption.

The views which ultimately prevailed, and which attained to the rank of authoritative dogma, were not those which commended themselves as the most intelligible and the most rational solutions. The opinions which were branded as heretical sometimes made a much stronger appeal to minds of a philosophical cast, since they avoided apparent contradictions, got rid of some real difficulties, and had the advantage of being more thinkable. That the orthodox definitions were confessedly mysteries—doctrines which it was beyond the power of the mind to grasp—shows that the governing motive in framing them was that there were imperious religious considerations which required them to be affirmed.

## I

The Christian doctrine of God is a Theism enriched by what was given historically in and through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament religion was based on a conception of the Divine Being and attributes which, if not fully commensurate with the divine reality, at least asserted the essential truths of the divine unity and personality, and also included the fundamental attributes of power, wisdom, holiness and goodness. How much more, then, did those know of God, and possess in God, who took up their position within the sphere of the work, the benefactions and the light of the religion founded by Jesus Christ? Part of it was that they had received from Jesus as teacher or prophet a republication of the assured truth concerning God, which was also more than a republication, in that it laid a stronger emphasis on an attribute which is all-essential for religion, and also brought it into more particular relations to mankind. Jesus emphasised the paramount place of love in the Divine Being by speaking of God, in terms of love, as the Heavenly Father; and He also expounded the divine love, which had been generally conceived as loving favour towards a chosen people, as a holy love which embraces individuals, which wills for them the highest spiritual blessings, and which surrounds them with the care and the discipline dictated by their individual needs. But the message of Christ concerning God was known to be only part of a larger and more precious gift. Not only a knowledge of God, but God Himself, had come near to them in Christ, and become their possession. Taking into account the whole of the impression made by Christ—the claim of a

unique Sonship, the character of sinless perfection, the accompanying evidences of a superhuman power and dignity, and above all the work done by Him in bringing them into filial relations with God, and in sustaining and upholding them, as their risen and exalted Lord, in a world of heavenly blessings and energies—they felt that in Christ's dealings with them they were in the hands of God. They were also conscious of an experience growing out of their faith and their relation to Christ, which, contrasted as it was with the sin-ruled and earth-bound life, and pulsating with the noblest aspirations and with victorious energies, could only be interpreted as meaning that God by His Spirit dwelt in them—that they had become partakers of the very life of God. And the problem for Christian thought was to do justice to the fact that in Christ believers met and dealt with God, and that a new life had sprung up within the sphere of the Christian religion which was none other than the life of God in the souls of men, and at the same time to maintain the truth which was felt to stand between them and an unreliable and anarchical universe—that the Divine Being is one God.

A natural way of approaching the problem was to assume that the unity of God implies that He is one person, and to go on to seek a meaning for the divinity of Christ which would be consistent with the divine unity as thus understood. When this conception of the divine unity was accepted as axiomatic it gave rise to the Monarchian scheme of thought.<sup>1</sup> But from this starting-point there developed two types of interpretation which reached very different results, and which

<sup>1</sup> On the narrower and the wider definitions of Monarchianism, see Harnack, *History of Dogma*, E. Tr., 1897, iii. pp. 10, 11.



came to be contrasted as the Scylla and Charybdis of heresy.<sup>1</sup>

‘When they perceived,’ says Novatian, ‘that God is one they thought that they could not otherwise hold such an opinion than by supposing that it must be believed, either that Christ was man only, or that He was really God the Father.’<sup>2</sup> And thus again, he adds, He was crucified between two thieves. The two types of theory are commonly distinguished as Dynamistic Monarchianism or Adoptianism, and Modalistic Monarchianism or Sabellianism. Adoptianism was rejected in a religious interest, because it thought too meanly of Christ, Modalism in an intellectual interest, because it thought of Christ with an audacity that brought it into collision with indisputable facts.

i. The Adoptianist doctrine, stated in its simplest form, was that while God is one person, it is possible to extend the idea of His divinity to other persons—notably to Jesus Christ, who stood to Him in a peculiar relation. In the human sphere it is an easy and familiar conception that a king, while a single person, may distribute his quality of royalty to officers and representatives, and especially to a prince of his house; and similarly it could be held that Christ, though first arriving at conscious existence as Jesus of Nazareth, was to be regarded as divine, because He was filled with the Spirit of God, was entrusted with a divine work, and reflected a divine power and glory. This type of interpretation naturally assumed many different forms—just as a similar mode of thought has passed through many gradations in later times from Socini-

<sup>1</sup> Novatian, *De Trinitate*, xxx. ; Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum*, § 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Liddon fails to appreciate the wide difference between these two types of speculation. *Divinity of our Lord*, 16th ed., 1892, p. 15.

anism to a pure Unitarianism; but so much at least was a constant element that no personal distinction was admitted in the Godhead proper, and consequently that the eternal Sonship of Christ was denied. The Dynamistic view of Christ is credibly ascribed to Hermas; it was expounded and defended by notable scholars and thinkers of the first half of the third century, such as the two Theodoti; and it was brought by Paul of Samosata into a shape in which it was officially condemned by a Synod of the Church, and also made approximately serviceable as a type of modern Christology.<sup>1</sup>

The unpardonable religious defect of the doctrine of Paul of Samosata, according to Eusebius, was 'that he entertained low and degrading notions about Christ, taught that He was in nature but a common man, denied that the Son of God descended from Heaven, and thus committed depredations on the flock of Christ.'<sup>2</sup> The usual theological argument was that Paul went against Scripture by postulating two Sons—an eternal Son seemingly identical with the Holy Spirit, and Jesus of Nazareth; but the heart-felt objection was that a Christ who was a man by nature, and Son of God only by grace or adoption, was inadequate to mediate the blessings of the Christian salvation. The Church held that it is necessary to believe that in Christ there became incarnate an eternal being, the Son of God, eternally distinct from the Father, and co-existing with the Father. In so interpreting the Divinity of Christ, it followed the lead of the apostolic

<sup>1</sup> See the sympathetic treatment by Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 78 ff., whose chief objection seems to be to certain features which it had in common with the older Socinianism, and which have been dropped in the Ritschlian Theology.

<sup>2</sup> *H. E.*, vii. 27.

writings, which unmistakably affirm the personal pre-existence of Christ, and show that the doctrine was believed to have been handed down from our Lord Himself.<sup>1</sup> This apostolic testimony, to take the lowest ground, is at least sufficient to prove that from the earliest times, and by thinkers of the keenest spiritual vision, it was felt that it was a religious necessity to believe in a previous existence in the eternal world of Him who, as Jesus Christ, was found on earth in fashion as a man. This feeling was rooted in several considerations. One was that believers had so deep an impression of the power, the grace and the majesty of the risen and glorified Christ, that they found it impossible to think of His present estate as other than a resumption of the prerogatives and the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. The logic of the position seemed to be: Christ is known to be God, and if now God, He must have been God eternally. If not God eternally, He is not God even now. Further, while it is true that the cardinal religious interest is to be sure that in God the infinite attributes are conjoined with an all-embracing and self-sacrificing love to man, it seemed that this truth was endangered if Christ was construed as a late and temporary manifestation of the life of God. It may indeed be contended that the appearance of such a one as Christ is sufficient evidence of the sovereign Christian postulate—that all which was manifested in Christ exists in God—but it is a weighty fact that the general verdict of those who live within the economy of the Christian salvation has been that salvation is endangered by the denial of the pre-existence of Christ as the Eternal Son. Above all, it was felt that the reduction of Christ to the proportions

<sup>1</sup> Philippians ii. 6 ff.; Hebrews i. 2 ff., ii. 16; John i. 1-14.



of a man filled with the Spirit had the character of a 'depredation' upon the flock, since it robbed them of a Saviour who could be depended on for the knowledge and the power that ensured salvation. If he Himself needed to be saved from ignorance, temptation and mortality, how could He be confidently trusted to save others? <sup>1</sup>

ii. In the Modalistic form of Monarchianism, the divine unity was combined with the divinity of Christ in the way which would naturally occur to the plain mind. If God be one person, and if Christ were God, it seems to follow that Christ was God in the sense that the personality of the one God was identical for the time being with that of Jesus Christ. When royalty is reported to have come to a city—to adapt an illustration of Athanasius—it is natural to suppose that the ruler of the realm, though he may have temporarily laid aside pomp and ceremony, and even his name, has arrived in person furnished with all his wonted authority and power. In similar fashion the incarnation and mission of Christ were conceived by the early Modalists as a sojourn on earth of the one God in the totality of the modes of His being, and of His perfections. Their doctrine was usually defined in such terms as these: 'That the Father Himself came down into the Virgin, was Himself born of her, Himself suffered, indeed was Himself Jesus Christ' <sup>2</sup>; or again: 'That one cannot believe in one only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one person.'

<sup>1</sup> 'A religion which promised its adherents that their natures could be rendered divine could only be satisfied by a Redeemer who in his own person had deified human nature.'—Harnack, *ibid.*, pp. 10 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* He adds that Praxeas rendered a twofold service to the devil in Rome—he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father. Similarly Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum*.

During the third century this theory was widely current both in the East and in the West, was favoured by the multitude, was supported by some theologians of mark, and was only suppressed after a violent struggle.<sup>1</sup> It finally found the form most satisfactory to the antique mind—so far as it sought to move on these lines—in the teachings of Sabellius, with whose name the general type of speculation has since been associated. According to some reports Sabellius reproduced the idea that the one infinite and personal being successively assumed the characters of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—and in such fashion that the Father ceased to be when the Son came to be, and that, the Son having ceased, God is now, and will continue to be, God the Holy Ghost. It is, however, open to argument, in the light of the historical evidence, that Sabellius had realised the impossibility of working out the idea of successive transmutations; and that he had raised the theory to the higher plane in which it has widely appealed to philosophical theology—viz. that the one personal God has manifested, and continues to manifest Himself in the realms of nature and grace, as simultaneously Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In its simplest form—that as Jesus Christ the Father was born, and suffered and died, the Monarchian theory fully satisfied the religious demand that Christ must be great enough to be trusted as a Saviour. ‘I have glorified Christ,’ cried Noetus, ‘what evil have I done?’<sup>2</sup> As a fact the theory satisfied the religious demand in the fullest and most decisive fashion, inasmuch as, without any suggestion of reservation, it ascribed to Jesus Christ all the plenitude of God. That Modalism was nevertheless condemned and expelled is instructive

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *ibid.*, p. 5 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum*.

as showing that the mind insisted on its rights alongside of the religious heart, and refused to allow the establishment of a formula which was demonstrably inconsistent with recognised facts, and thus indefensibly irrational. The main ground on which stress was laid in the orthodox opposition was that in Scripture the Son is distinguished from the Father, and in particular that in the history and self-witness of Christ He appears in relations to the Father which are utterly incompatible with personal identity. It was also felt to be irrational to say that the Father had been crucified—that God as God is immortal, and yet was found mortal. In the improved form in which the divinity of Christ is resolved into a temporal manifestation of the uni-personal God—who, at the same time, abides as the ground, the end, and the directing power of all existence—Sabellianism is not open to the same objections which crushed the old Modalism. But, in becoming more rational, neo-Sabellianism became less serviceable to religion, since there is a sense in which with this conception all becomes divine, and it seems arbitrary to speak of a Trinity of manifestation instead of a multiplicity. Nor is it easy on these terms to establish that God was in Christ in a unique way, or at least that He was present in the fulness of His being and perfections.

iii. In comparison with a simplified Adoptianism and a neo-Sabellianism, the Arian heresy has little importance for modern thought. It contended for the personal pre-existence of Christ in opposition to Monarchianism, and thereby it kept in closer touch with the general Christian instinct; but in its further attempt to reconcile the unity of God with the divinity of Christ, it came into collision with vital elements of the Christian religion. Its reconciliation of the two positions practically consisted in



this, that the Divinity of Christ is not subversive of the divine unity, inasmuch as Christ is only semi-divine. Though the greatest of all beings under God, and invested with the most splendid powers and offices, He was still a creature, who was created out of nothing, and whose existence had a beginning. The religious objections to this construction were serious. One was that, in holding Christ to be less than God, while yet it proposed that He should retain His place as the object of religious trust and adoration, Arianism re-established a worship of the creature which is idolatry. But the decisive consideration was that a Christ who was not truly God was held to be incapable of fulfilling the office of a Saviour. This was partly grounded on a peculiar Greek view as to human salvation being mediated through physical contact with the divine; but it also appealed to the general mind in the form that if Christ was not God, eternally God, and co-equal with God, an element of grave doubt arose as to His knowledge of God, and especially as to His power to save.<sup>1</sup>

iv. In opposition to the Monarchian theory it is affirmed in the orthodox dogma that there subsists eternally in God, in correspondence with the threefold manifestation in time, a threefold distinction of persons. In opposition to Arianism it was maintained that the three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—are consubstantial, co-eternal and co-equal in power and glory. But this did not carry with it the consequence that, as three human persons are three human beings, the three Divine Persons were three Divine Beings. ‘The Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy

<sup>1</sup> *Athanasius contra Arianos*, i. 3 ff. On other religious and moral defects, see Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, 1882.

Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.’<sup>1</sup> To each of the Persons the divine nature belongs in its plenitude and totality. The parallel conception would be to suppose that there could exist three persons who were one human being, and that each of these while distinct from the others also constituted the whole of humanity. ‘In the material realm,’ says Augustine, ‘one thing is not so much as three things taken together; and two things are somewhat more than one; but in the supreme Trinity one is as much as three taken together, and two are not anything more than one. They are all in themselves infinite.’<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic doctrine of the Trinity was formulated as that which best safeguarded the Christian salvation, and as the best theoretical statement of what emerged after the elimination of the rival theories by which salvation was believed to be endangered or even subverted. But in energetically championing the religious interest which demanded that there should be no dubiety as to the presence of God in the person and work of the Saviour, theology found itself involved in grave intellectual difficulty, inasmuch as the completed dogma was admittedly above reason. It is not indeed a substantial objection to the doctrine that it is difficult and obscure; since it is supremely credible that the Being of God includes modes of existence and of activity which have no parallel in our finite form of being; and it is only to be expected that, in the event of a special self-manifestation of God in human history and experience, this would leave us in possession of materials which we could not easily organise with the help of our ordinary categories, or easily discern to be consistent

<sup>1</sup> *Symbolum Quicumque*, 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *De Trinitate*, x. 12.

with itself. On the other hand, the intellectual side of human nature has its wants, and makes its appeal to God, equally with the moral and religious side; and it would be a serious blemish on the perfect religion if, in making provision for our spiritual needs, it left us in a condition of intellectual oppression and dissatisfaction. We find accordingly that relief has been sought from the intellectual burden of the mystery in two ways. The usual way has been to accept it as a truth which, though profoundly mysterious, may at least be confidently accepted on the authority of revelation, and to hold that the rights of reason are sufficiently respected in that it cannot be shown to be a self-contradictory doctrine. The other method has been to try to show that it is not above reason, but is entirely rational—either in that it is a reassertion of truths about God which are intelligible and otherwise guaranteed, or even that it makes a rich and self-authenticating addition to what may be known of God.

1. The first of these types of thought has furnished an intellectual *modus vivendi* to the great majority of the Christian minds which have made the doctrine the subject of reflection. It is held that there is adequate historical evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as that of the Incarnation, was an original element of the Gospel communicated by Christ to His Apostles, and that the apparent difficulties would vanish if we possessed the full commentary from the same source from which we have derived the revealed truth.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, impossible to put the case higher than that the ecclesiastical dogma was reached by necessary inference from the elements of the Christian revelation, and that it represents the least assailable combina-

<sup>1</sup> Illingworth, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1907, ch. iii.



tion and interpretation of the cardinal data of that revelation which were furnished in the person and work of Christ, and in the experience of the primitive Church. It is rightly contended that the dogma is at least not contrary to reason. It does not violate a law of thought by affirming that He is that which at the same time He is not. To say that God is three in one and one in three is no more of a material contradiction than to say the same of the mind, which is a unity subsisting in a trinity of thought, feeling and will.

2. When fuller intellectual relief has been sought in a rational exposition and vindication of the doctrine of the Trinity, there has been a choice of two courses. One method is to treat the unity of the Divine Being as the absolutely assured datum, and to tone down the conception of personality, as applied to the eternal distinctions in the Godhead, to the point at which it is made to appear compatible with the numerical oneness of God. The other method is to accept and vindicate the conception of a manifold personality in God as a real addition to theistic thought, and to take the risk of this involving a revision of the axiom of the divine unity as this has hitherto been understood and held.

(a) The difficulty of conceiving how three Persons can be numerically one God has been met by modifying the meaning of personality. We use it to describe a subject which is a centre of self-conscious life, and the Trinitarian formula naturally suggests that we are similarly to think of three separate centres of self-conscious existence and of self-determined volition as subsisting within the one and undivided divine essence. As used by the Fathers and the Schoolmen, it has been contended, it meant no more than that the being of God includes certain fundamental attributes. 'God is power,'

says Dr. Rashdall, 'and God is wisdom, and God is will—that is the recognised scholastic explanation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Or, since the will of God is always a loving will, the Schoolmen tell us the Holy Spirit may indifferently be spoken of as Will or as Love; from the union of Power and Wisdom in God there proceeds a loving will.'<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult, now, to marshal some evidence in support of this interpretation. The patristic argument for the eternal generation of the Son often takes the form that wisdom is an essential attribute of God and must therefore have existed eternally in God.<sup>2</sup> Augustine frankly confesses the inadequacy of the word person to describe the eternal distinctions in the Godhead. 'When it is asked what are the three,' he says in effect, 'human speech is in difficulties through its great poverty. We say three Persons, not because we have found the right word, but because silence is worse.'<sup>3</sup> But we have to be on our guard against confounding Augustine's analogies with his express doctrinal statements. It is merely an instance of his favourite analogy colouring a quasi-doctrinal statement when he speaks of the Holy Ghost as 'the love wherewith the begotten is loved by the begetter, and loves the begetter.'<sup>4</sup> In general it must be said that this reduction of the idea of personality is inconsistent with the general scheme of thought developed in the Creeds on the basis of the Scriptural references to the pre-existent Christ and the significance of the Incarnation. It is impossible to doubt that for patristic thought at least two of the Persons in the Godhead exhibited from eternity distinctive notes

<sup>1</sup> *Doctrine and Development*, 1898, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.*, v. 6; *Athan. contra Arian.*, i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *De Trinitate*, v. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. 5.

of personality—in that the Son knew the Father and was known by the Father, and in that He loved and was loved by the Father. The New Testament conception that the gift of the Son was an expression of the self-sacrificing love of the Father was certainly taken over by the Church,<sup>1</sup> and the conception of self-sacrificing love was somewhat out of place if all that was meant was that God manifested His attribute of wisdom in the person and life of Jesus Christ. It might be that all the truth in the doctrine of the Trinity was that it reaffirmed in peculiar terms a doctrine of fundamental attributes, but it is at least certain that considerably more was intended.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there is no reason why the divine attribute of wisdom should be exclusively connected with Jesus Christ. The divine holiness and love, and the divine power in some measure, were revealed in Him as well as the divine wisdom. He should therefore have been described, if person be synonymous with attribute, as an Incarnation of the three Persons of the Trinity.

(b) The distinction of divine persons affirmed in the Catholic dogma has also been resolved into the distinction which we are accustomed to draw between God as transcendent and God as immanent in the world. As immanent God may be denominated the Son; or a further distinction may be drawn between God as immanent in the world in general—God the Son—and God as immanent in the life of rational and moral beings—God the Holy Ghost. In another view,

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> The ordinary view is that it meant more than an attribute and less than the modern connotation of personality. ‘The three subjects ranked neither as separate persons, nor as attributes of the real divine being, but as three special bearers or independent foci of all attributes and activities of their common divinity, and also of a peculiar and characteristic property.’—F. Nitzsch, *Evangelische Dogmatik*, ii. p. 415.



widely held in the Hegelian school, the Son is to be identified with the universe, and the conception is brought somewhat closer to the dogma by the affirmation of the eternity of the Universe. It is, now, arguable that Philo in his doctrine of the Logos was only expressing in a different way the truth which we otherwise express in a doctrine of divine immanence and transcendence; but the conception of the Logos as taken over in the Johannine Theology was undoubtedly enriched by the notion of a personal life and of personal relations to the Father<sup>1</sup>; and it cannot be supposed that the Catholic theologians fell back from the apostolic testimony on the position of Philo, and regarded the Logos as a mere impersonal link between God and the world. The conception of the universe as the Eternal Son differs radically from the ideas entertained on both sides in the ancient controversies; and while this conserves a form of Trinitarian doctrine, it makes it unavailable for the purpose in which the Church was really interested—viz. to establish identity of being between a second Person of the Trinity who is eternal God and the person who appeared in human form as Jesus Christ.

3. According to another group of thinkers the doctrine of a threefold or multiple personality in God, instead of needing to be explained away into something more apparently rational, has independent support on speculative grounds, and is to be welcomed as a valuable addition to the theistic doctrine. The argument has two branches according as we start from the idea of God as an intelligence or as a moral being.

(a) A process of thought implies that there is a thinker who is conscious of himself along with, and in

<sup>1</sup> John i. 1 ff.

distinction from, an object of thought. 'You can no more conceive of the subject apart from the object of thought,' says Caird, 'than you can think of a positive without a negative, an inside apart from an outside, a centre apart from a circumference.'<sup>1</sup> This condition of thought, now, it is argued, which exists and has existed eternally for God, 'requires us to posit an immanent distinction in the Godhead, through which the divine consciousness carries its object within itself; and this is neither an ideal, nor finite, nor impersonal object, but one in which God sees His own personal image perfectly expressed.'<sup>2</sup> The part of this argument which is not quite convincing is the contention that the object of the divine thought must possess the note of personality. It is not even convincing that God cannot be an infinite intelligence except on the terms that there is given to Him in thought a second Being co-equal with Himself. The conditions of the intellectual problem seem to be sufficiently met, if not by the assumption of an eternal act of creation, at least by the fact that His own being, His own purposes, all things past, present and future, and all possibilities, were eternally present to His mind.

(b) The implications of the moral attributes of God are more far-reaching. It would appear that the attribute of holiness cannot be affirmed in any full sense as an attribute unless we import into the idea of the Godhead at least a twofold distinction. It may be thought a defect if, while we conceive of man as touching his highest spiritual level when he experiences the religious sentiments of reverence, trust and self-surrender, we are unable to connect any corresponding idea with the

<sup>1</sup> *Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, i. p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*, 6th ed., 1902, p. 273; Illingworth, *op. cit.*

perfection of God. All that is yielded by a bare Theism is the idea of God as contemplating, with infinite complacency, the perfection of His own being, the immensity of His creation, and the goodness of His works. The divine holiness acquires a new depth and sanctity when we conceive of the Godhead also as involving a communion of Persons who reverently find, each in each, the plenitude of the Divine Being and attributes.

(c) Especially does the divine attribute of love seem to carry this implication. It cannot be supposed, it is said, that love—the essential attribute, the crowning glory of the divine nature, should ever have been held in suspense, and baffled in its desire to cherish and bless. To this it is added with more plausibility than in the intellectual argument that there must have been an adequate object of the infinite love of God, and that this implied the eternal existence of a second being who was ‘the express image of the Father.’ Nor can it fairly be said that the conditions of the problem are sufficiently met by the hypothesis that God has eternally created a universe peopled with finite beings to be the object of His loving care. Apart from the difficulty of assuming the eternity of the Universe, it may well be supposed that perfect divine love no less than human love presupposes a likeness of nature, and that eternity has been the scene of ‘an absolute reciprocity of thought and feeling in the life of the Eternal, of Infinitude yielding itself to Infinitude, of God as known and being known, loving and being loved by God.’<sup>1</sup> It may be

<sup>1</sup> Caird, *op. cit.*, i. p. 78. This train of thought was developed by Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, iii. tom. cxcvi. in Migne’s *Patrologia*. ‘Nihil charitate perfectius. Ubi pluralitas personarum deest, charitas omnino esse non potest.’ See also Sartorius, *Lehre von der Heiligen Liebe*, E. Tr., 1884.



added that the duality of persons, which the argument suggests, is not unnaturally developed into the conception of a Trinity. The idea of personality cannot indeed be attached to the mutual love of the Father and the Son—which appears as the third moment in the Augustinian analogy; but a third person in the union is at least suggested by the observation that the highest level is reached in the reciprocal love of two persons when there is a third personal life which is the object of their common love and devotion.

The conception that the Divine Being includes the interplay of the activities which have their seat in centres of self-conscious life is one which derives support from other considerations. For one thing, while man as made in the image of God reflects what we may call the groundwork of the Divine Being, it is probable that the Infinite Spirit includes modes of being which are more rich and complex than those which are disclosed in the mechanism and the processes of the spiritual life of finite individuals. It may well be urged, further, that in the attempts of natural theology to construe the Divine Being attention has been fixed too exclusively upon man regarded in his individual and isolated capacity as giving us our clearest glimpse of the God in whose image we are made. If God is to be construed in terms of the highest category at our disposal, it might seem that as the richest and fullest life, both intellectual and ethical, is met with in social groups such as the family or the Church, it is these aggregates rather than the individual that enable us to think our truest thought about the mode of the divine existence. There is, indeed, one objection which is commonly held to discredit any attempt to conceive the ultimate fact in the Divine Being as a system of personal

relations, and to speak of God as a community of persons. It is that, if we are in earnest in accepting the consequences of a manifold personality, we fall into the fatal error of Tritheism. But probably some fresh thinking requires to be done in regard to Tritheism. In the patristic period it only required to be named to stand condemned; inasmuch as it suggested a polytheism akin to that of the heathen religions, where a multiplicity of gods implied a multitude of diverse policies and of conflicting wills, and consequently undermined confidence in the world as a cosmos and as the seat of a divine government. Whether the same objections, intellectual or religious, have the same force when the persons of a divine community pursue the same purpose, operate with the same power, and are knit together by mutual love, is at least open to question. We have analogies which show that a community of individuals may issue in the unity of a single mind, a single heart and a single will. It is a current conception, with a basis of truth, that in spite of the great diversities of its component individuals, there emerges a national character which has a certain unity of thought, of sentiment and of aim. On a higher level it is a familiar thought that the larger multitude of individuals who form the true Church are in some way gathered up, in spite of their imperfections, into a grander personality so that the Church acquires in a sense the title of the body of Christ. It is therefore conceivable that these analogies point upward to the highest realm of being; and that in it there is a spiritual society of separate persons who interpenetrate one another, and who unite, if not also in a single collective personality, at least in exercising the power, the wisdom, and the holiness of the Godhead.

## II

The dogma of the Trinity is closely bound up with the dogma of the Person of Christ. The former is concerned with the inner life of the eternal Godhead, and the place therein of the only-begotten Son; while the latter deals with the mode of the existence of the Son as incarnate, and this both in His estate of humiliation and exaltation. The doctrine of the Person of Christ is at once a presupposition and a consequence of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a presupposition, inasmuch as the doctrine of the Trinity was due to the necessity of reconstruing the doctrine of God in the light of His revelation in Christ. On the other hand it was only after the formulation of the dogma of the Trinity that the mind of the Church was concentrated on the problem of the constitution of the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Christological problem was the analysis of the Person of Christ as the meeting-place of the divine and human. In doing so, suggestions seem to have been borrowed from physical analogies. A union of two physical substances may be effected in various ways. We may suppose one to be cut and fashioned so as to fit the other, as the handle is accommodated to the head of an axe to form a single implement. We may suppose that the two unite, as in a chemical fusion, to create a new substance. Or we may suppose that, as in processes of the animal organism, one absorbs alien material into its own constitution, and transforms it into the substance of its own frame. Finally, the two may simply be placed side by side; and, to use a simile of Luther, may possess no more unity than two boards which have been placed in juxtaposition. These images may help to make clearer the tentative in-



terpretations of the Person of Christ which were condemned as heretical. The theory of Apollinaris was that in Christ human nature was reduced to a body and an animal soul, and that the divine nature was so joined to it as, by contributing to it the rational part, to form one complete being. The Monophysite position was to affirm that, as the result of the union, the human nature fused with the divine to form a new type of being, or, according to another view, that the human was absorbed in the divine. And finally, the Nestorian doctrine so emphasised the distinctness of the natures, and allowed so little interpenetration, that it was held to involve that Christ was two persons.<sup>1</sup>

In regard to these various theories of the Person of Christ, two things are certain. One is that there was a problem which lay as a heavy burden upon the mind of the Church. The other is that those who took part in the fierce and long-drawn controversies were fighting for a cause which they felt to involve a vital religious issue.

The Monophysites, as the name implies, attributed to the incarnate Christ a single nature. The explanation of their passionate assertion of the doctrine of a single nature was that they felt that Christ, by taking up human nature into His Person, and transmuting it into the divine, gave an earnest of the reality of our redemption. In the fact that human nature has been, so to speak, deified in Christ, they saw the prototype, and also the sure pledge, of the attainment by man unto the sphere and dignity of a divine and immortal life.<sup>2</sup> A Christ to whom two natures were ascribed

<sup>1</sup> It would seem that the Nestorian view was only attributed to Nestorius by doing some of his thinking for him, and that he might have accepted the Chalcedonian formula. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching*, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

seemed to give no such assurance; for such a Christ was held to be in the last resort a man consorting with God, who Himself depended on God or the eternal Son of God for salvation, and by whom no more was done for human nature than is accomplished by suasion and example. To the Nestorians, following the School of Antioch, it seemed that this was a pious view which, as in the case of Modalism, flourished through defiance of fact. Distinguished for the most part by its devotion to the study of Scripture, this school had been deeply impressed by the fact that the Jesus of the Gospels was, not a divinity in disguise, but truly and completely man. And apart from its biblical interests, it is clear that it also felt that a vital religious issue was involved in the affirmation of the reality and completeness of the human nature. How could men surely reckon on the sympathy of Christ, and on His qualification to bring the burdens and the woes of His people adequately before God, unless they could believe that He possesses a true and full human experience? How could He, as only a seeming man, have the worth of a pattern and example?

The final pronouncement of the Church, embodied in the symbol of Chalcedon, was to the effect that the Monophysite and Nestorian views were alike one-sided, and that the truth lay in combining belief in the unity of the person with the affirmation of the distinctness and integrity of the two natures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'We teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in Manhood, truly God and truly Man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood, in all things like us without sin . . . in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction

The same observation may be repeated which was made in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity: we can discern in the separate moments of the doctrine a religious justification or necessity, while the synthesis in which they are united is difficult and even bewildering. The constituent elements of the doctrine were the truths which remained after the exclusion of the apparently impossible positions. That Christ was not truly man was ruled out, not only by the irresistible evidence of the evangelical record, but by the conviction that without a true humanity Christ could not be a sympathetic Saviour, or indeed a Saviour at all. That He was not truly divine was ruled out by the conviction that, if He was less than God, the truth of His Word and the power of His grace were not sufficiently established. That He was not two persons, but one, was ruled out by the historical record in which He appeared as one Person, and also by the suspicion that if a divine and human person were postulated the divine Saviour would retreat out of sight behind the human person of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. On the other hand the position taken up by the Church in defence of vital religious interests was found to be beset by very grave intellectual difficulties. The combination of ideas used to elucidate the subject is the same as in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity; but while the Trinity is construed as consisting of three persons in one nature, the being of Christ is interpreted as consisting of one person in two natures. The latter conception, indeed, comes closer to modes of being of

of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.'—Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, ii. p. 62 ff.



which we can frame a conception. It has been usual to draw an illustration from our own constitution. In the human constitution there is a duality of natures, the spiritual and the material, which exist in intimate union, and do not suffer mutilation as the consequence of the union, and which are held together by the principle of a single personal life. And there is, it is suggested in the Athanasian Creed,<sup>1</sup> no more difficulty in supposing that the one Person of Christ, while rooted in the divine nature, had at His disposal all the finite powers of a man along with the infinite perfections of the Godhead, than there is in conceiving that the human ego acts in the world through a physical organism while also acting within the spiritual sphere with the powers proper to spirit. But this is not a true parallel. The fact that a human being, in virtue of his composite constitution, does things so diverse as to think and to move about in space, does not greatly help us to grasp the idea of a person who, in virtue of two natures, performs the same kind of acts under totally different conditions, so that at one and the same time He is omniscient in virtue of His divine nature and limited in knowledge in virtue of His human nature, and who similarly is at the same time omnipotent and also subject to human weakness and infirmity.

(a) It is also open to question whether the Chalcedonian definition of the Person of Christ as one person subsisting in two complete natures is self-consistent. The Monophysite objection to the doctrine of two complete natures was that it was held to carry with it the consequence of a dual personality; the unrefining Nestorian seems to have accepted the inference; and it is arguable that they were at least right when they agreed as to what the position involved. When it is asserted

<sup>1</sup> 37, 8.

that Christ possessed a true and full humanity, including human intelligence, human affections and a human will, it would seem that this is an endowment which implies and issues in the existence of a human ego.

(b) It has also been doubted whether, in the Catholic definition of the unique content of the Person of Christ, use was made even of the most satisfactory categories at our disposal. The fundamental idea is that of the distinction of the divine and human natures—one having as its distinctive note infinitude, the other finitude, and the two being thus separated by the whole diameter of being. But if it be a truth that man is contrasted with God as the finite with the infinite, it is a truth of equal importance that man is made in the divine image, and that it is his destiny to be renewed in the same image, and to be a partaker of the divine nature. It might therefore seem to be truer, and not less in harmony with Scripture, to affirm that in Christ there was one nature, or at least one mode of being—viz. a humanity which was divine because it exhibited all that humanity was destined to be in union with God, and also a divinity which was human in that it was manifested only in so far as was possible within the limitations of a human experience.<sup>1</sup>

(c) It has also been objected to the rationality of the Catholic dogma of the one person in two natures that it involves a psychological impossibility. It undoubtedly implies, in its affirmation of the integrity of the two natures, that He possessed two streams of consciousness—one filled with the content of an infinite intelligence,

<sup>1</sup> 'If the ethical is the most essential element of the idea both of God and man, it can be no longer permitted to describe the idea of humanity, which attained realisation in the humanity of Christ, as fundamentally different from God.'—Dorner, *Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, E. Tr., 1861, II. i. 116.



the other with the content of a finite intelligence. In the expositions of the older theologians it was not doubted that these two forms of consciousness were simultaneous and continuous; and yet some moderns, who even claim to be Catholic in their thinking, do not hesitate to describe the conception as investing the life of Christ with a certain grotesqueness, and as even weakening the impression of reality and sincerity.<sup>1</sup> It may, indeed, be said that it is rash to dogmatise about psychological possibility in the case even of normal human nature, and more than rash to profess to fathom the depths, and to define the forms, of the experience of a personality that was unique in respect of origin, and also in respect of intimacy and continuity of filial communion with the Father. But it is at least true that the idea of a simultaneous double consciousness alienates intellectual sympathy to an extent which seriously prejudices the religious truth which it is sought to express. The difficulty has been somewhat diminished by the proposal of some theologians to borrow from the recent philosophy of the subconscious—giving up the idea of the co-existence in the mind of Christ of an infinite and finite consciousness, and substituting the idea of successive phases of consciousness on the two planes of the divine and human.<sup>2</sup>

2. In so far as modern theology has tried to frame its own thoughts about the Person of Christ, and has not been content merely to reproduce the definitions of the ancient Church, it has usually taken one or other of two directions. It has started either from the Monarchian or from the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. In the

<sup>1</sup> Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, E. Tr., 1866, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> Dykes, 'The Person of Christ,' *Expository Times*, 1905; Sanday, *Christology and Personality*, 1911.



former case, the doctrine of the Person of Christ is worked out on the lines of the theory associated of old with Paul of Samosata; and Jesus Christ is affirmed while human to be also divine, on the ground that the Spirit of God dwelt in Him above measure, and that in Him were manifested the perfections and purposes of God. The other course is to presuppose the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity; but with a view to obviate the psychological difficulty above referred to, and from a desire to deal honestly with the evidence of the Gospel records, to connect the Incarnation with a temporary limitation or demission of certain divine attributes and prerogatives.<sup>1</sup> The kenotic theory, it is true, introduces fresh and grave difficulties of its own. It is not easy to see how it can be held by those who consider the creed of Chalcedon to have the stamp of finality, as it involves a tampering with the integrity and completeness of the divine nature such as was explicitly condemned in affirming the Incarnation to have taken place without confusion or change of the natures.<sup>2</sup> It is a more serious objection that it involves a departure from what has hitherto been conceived as axiomatic of God, to suppose that One who was God could become less than God, and should again become very God of very God. The possibility and coherence of the theory also become doubtful when the matter is thought out from the psychological standpoint. It may even be thought that, from a religious point of view, the kenotic theory is inferior to the construction which founds on a merely economic Trinity, since the former brings us into contact with

<sup>1</sup> On types of the kenotic theory, see Bruce, *Humiliation of Christ*, 1876.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Gore has not sufficiently discussed the compatibility of his kenotic theory with the orthodoxy of Chalcedon.—*The Incarnation of the Son of God*, 1891; *Dissertations*, 1895.

One who was only partially God, while the latter finds in Him One in whom we come into immediate touch with the God of all power and wisdom and grace. On the other hand, the kenotic theory in its moderate form seems to yield the only possible interpretation of the Person of Christ, provided we are to give weight to the religious considerations which demand the pre-existence of the Son of God, and also to give weight to the evidence of the evangelists who reported to us all that is known of Jesus Christ.

### III

The heretical interpretations of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ were rejected as tending to undermine the Christian scheme of salvation, and the dogmas as finally formulated were felt to be necessary to safeguard the Christian salvation, while they were usually confessed to be mysteries in the sense of being incomprehensible by the human mind. This, now, is undoubtedly a serious state of matters, since in religion it is upon the idea of God that everything ultimately depends; and it seems to be a real source of weakness that in the Christian religion the choice should be between a doctrine of the Godhead which is false and harmful, and one which has the effect of confusing and even paralysing the mind. But it is not thus that it has worked in practice. Theories of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, which have been condemned as heretical, have contained enough of life-giving truth to meet the needs of sinful and mortal men. On the other hand, the Catholic doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, though unthinkable in their totality, embody truths which are luminous as the sun, and which constitute a large part of the power and the

comfort of the Christian religion. Upon these two aspects of the case a few words may be added.

1. In the first place, it seems clear that there is a Christian conception of God and of Christ which is sufficient, even when encased in a heretical setting, to enable the saving energies of the Christian economy to do work with real efficiency. It is doubtless true that the saints were found for the most part within the pale of orthodoxy, and that there is a peculiar quality of devout and spiritual character which is associated with zealous loyalty to the formulas of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Against Arianism there has been drawn up a formidable charge of religious indifference and ethical weakness.<sup>1</sup> Still more clearly is it evidenced by history that the Ebionitic heresy, which reduces Christ to the proportions and significance of a mere man, entails a limitation of access to the vitalising powers of the Christian economy. In the Christological controversy, however, the section which carried the decrees of Chalcedon was certainly not on a higher spiritual plane than those who formulated their thoughts in the dubious language of Cyril of Alexandria. In modern Protestant Christendom it is certain that popular thinking on the doctrines in question is largely, even when unconsciously, heterodox. It is made clear in attacks upon Christianity that many must have been brought up to hold the patripassian view, and suppose that it was God the Father who, in the Person of Christ, was nailed upon the cross. With more confidence it may be asserted that in a great mass of popular Christian thinking the doctrine of the Trinity is taken in a tritheistic sense, and that Christ is adored and trusted as a second God. On the other side, a conception of the Incarnate Christ is widely prevalent which

<sup>1</sup> Gwatkin, *op. cit.*



attributes to Him no more of humanity, perhaps even less, than was ascribed to Him by Apollinaris, and which revolts from any serious assertion of His humanity as a virtual negation of His divinity. There are professed champions of Catholic orthodoxy who do not really believe in the reality of the human nature. That the Christian religion, in spite of this chaos of crude or questionable theology, continues to do its work abundantly as an instrument of reconciliation, of renewal and of comfort, is due to the fact that with the crudities and the errors there is bound up in the mind the truth that God is Almighty, All-wise and All-good, and that the believing soul meets God in Christ.

2. The Catholic doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, if above reason in their definition of the divine being and relations, are at least supremely luminous and credible in the guidance which they give in our practical relations with God. The practical outcome of the doctrine of the Trinity may be expressed by saying that when we conceive of God we think that Christ is in God to all eternity. We think of the eternal God in terms of Christ. Whatever the difficulties of the formulated doctrine, it is not difficult to grasp the practical consequence which it supported—viz. that what we have found in Christ of holiness and grace and love has been comprehended, and that eternally, in the being, the purposes and the acts of God. We affirm the Christ-likeness of the eternal God. And we have a title to affirm it from reason as well as from revelation. We are bound, as has been already said, to conceive of God in terms of the highest that we know; and in the ethical sphere the highest has been made known to us, not in the love of man and woman, not even in fatherhood and motherhood, but in holy and

self-sacrificing love as it was expressed and wrought out in the unique life of Jesus Christ. It is in a sense matter of reason as well as of faith that he that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father—that in Him who was found in fashion as a man, was tempted in all points like as we are, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, were also manifested the holiness and the compassion that govern the dealings of God with our sinful world, that in Him we see into the heart of God and see that God is love. It is because the Catholic dogma of the Trinity, notwithstanding its burden of intellectual difficulty, is the least unsatisfactory of the attempts that have been made to state the truth of the eternal presence in God of the life and love that came to expression in Jesus Christ, that it has maintained its position at the heart of the Christian religion.

The practical outcome for our thought of the dogma of the Person of Christ is the complementary truth that in Christ man has access to the grace and the life of God. The attempt to define the relation of the divine and human in the Person of Christ is beset by grave difficulties; and it may well be that it is not within the power of theology to enter into and to describe the constitution of the Person of Christ. But the dogma contains a supremely comprehensible element which also furnishes a great part of the power and comfort of the Christian religion. For it means that the Christian religion is not merely a system of ideas, but an economy of spiritual power—that through Christ souls are brought into contact with the forgiving grace of God, and with the energies of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son which are able to make alive, to give strength to them that have no might, and to comfort them that mourn.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GENIUS OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

ROMAN CATHOLICISM attests its greatness by the fact that it is one of the real dividing forces of the spiritual world. It is easy to take up towards it any attitude save that of indifference. One large section of Christendom regards the system with unbounded reverence and trust; another views it with indignation, loathing and fear. To one the Roman Catholic Church is the true and final form of Christianity, the mother of saints, the ark of salvation floating upon the stormy waters of time. To another it is, if not the great apostasy of prediction, at least a deep-seated and pestilent corruption of the Christian faith.

The veneration and self-sacrificing devotion which are evoked by the Roman Catholic Church would be impossible were it not that it conserves and builds upon fundamental truths of the Christian religion; and the antipathy which it arouses is due to the fact that in important particulars it has adulterated the content of the Christian religion, and that it has seriously impaired its efficacy.

Reverting to our analysis of the Christian religion, we find that the fundamental features are reproduced in Roman Catholicism. It has a firm grasp of the truth that Christianity is a salvation which is the means of procuring for men the highest blessings in



time and eternity; it holds and teaches the doctrine of God which combines the infinite attributes of power and wisdom with His all-holy love as revealed in Jesus Christ; and finally, it apprehends that the Christian system is an economy which is founded on and permeated by grace, and which works for the highest moral ends. But while true to type in these essential particulars, Roman Catholicism has modified each of them to some extent, and in particular it has developed a theory as to the provisions for the application of the Christian salvation which somewhat obscures the distinctive character of the Gospel, and somewhat interferes with its redeeming and moralising mission.

1. The conception of the nature and range of the blessings which are made available in the Christian Gospel, it has been observed, is a point upon which there is little difference of opinion in the great divisions of organised Christendom. Roman Catholicism, at all events, does not fail to do justice to the idea of eternal salvation as the response to the need of mortal man which is made by God in the revelation by Jesus Christ. At the worst, it may be said that it somewhat impairs the value of the gift of eternal life by the menace of the incalculable woes of Purgatory. Again, it lays due emphasis on the individual boons of forgiveness, regeneration and sanctification. It may be thought that it makes too little of the aspects of salvation which concern the well-being of individuals in this world and of the race—that in so far as it has adopted ascetic ideals it has improperly limited the content of the salvation which was designed to the world in the mission of Christ. But while in some parts of its doctrine it is chargeable with a too exclusively transcendental conception of the blessings of the Gospel, in

practice it has very effectively worked for temporal as well as for heavenly results. The Roman Catholic Church, though it may have a defective theory of what makes up human well-being, consistently acts on the view that the Gospel was given to bless this world and to enrich its life, as well as to rescue individual souls from spiritual death, and to build them up through sanctification unto everlasting life.

2. The Christian doctrine of God has a courageous and faithful witness in Roman Catholicism. It has met all anti-theistic systems—from Manichæanism to Agnosticism—with a resolute defence of the Christian doctrine of the being and attributes of God. Holding that the revealed dogmas of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ were authoritatively fixed by the Councils of the ancient Church, it proclaims these with a confidence, and gives to them a prominence, which are certainly not surpassed in the public teaching of any other Christian communion. But along with this vigorous testimony to the doctrines which have been elaborated as the theological basis of the Christian religion, and as the guarantee of its trustworthiness and efficacy, it is responsible for tenets which were summed up in old Protestant polemics as idolatrous, and which have been not unfairly described by modern Protestant theologians as the paganising element of Romanism. The genius of Paganism, apart from its unethical spirit, lies in its tendency to worship the creature in place of the Creator; and it is plausibly contended that the Roman Catholic Church made concessions to the paganism which lingered on in the Middle Ages, and which has an abiding fascination for human nature, by giving to creaturely beings and objects a real footing in the realm of the divine. The

adoration of the Virgin and of the saints, however it may be differentiated in theology from the worship paid to the one God, works out in practice in such fashion as to give to popular Catholicism a polytheistic outlook upon the world. The Roman Catholic conception of the Church might perhaps also be brought under this point of view, inasmuch as functions are ascribed to it which trench to some extent upon the divine prerogatives and operations. Specially it has been charged with idolatry in its doctrine of the Eucharist, with the consequent adoration of the Host. It is of course true that the intended object of worship in the Mass is the Divine Christ; but if the presupposition of transubstantiation be false, the language of the Protestant polemics was justifiable as well as intelligible when it inveighed against the doctrine as involving a mean and repulsive form of idolatry.

3. It is chiefly in reference to the theory of the appropriation of salvation that the Roman Catholic theology has developed its peculiar modifications of the Christian religion. What Rome was specially interested in was the nature of the provisions of the scheme of salvation, the mode of their operation, and the conditions under which they are made effective for the deliverance and the holy keeping of sinful men. In elaborating its scheme of salvation, as has been indicated, the Roman Catholic Church could not and did not forget that the Christian religion is founded on and pervaded by the idea of grace, and that it issues in morality. But on this general basis it reared a structure of soteriological doctrine which at some points is difficult to reconcile with authentic principles of the Gospel, and which has been described with justice as a Judaising revision of the Christian



religion. The features which justify this description are in the main three—the mediatorial function assigned to the Church, the one-sided sacramental system, and the partial rehabilitation of the idea of merit or work-righteousness. In these we may fitly see the peculiar genius of Roman Catholicism.

## I

In the first place, we observe the extraordinarily important place that is occupied in the Roman Catholic scheme of salvation by the idea of the Church. It is hardly incorrect to say that in the Roman Catholic conception the central feature of the Christian religion is the supernatural institution which represents Christ, which carries on His work, and which acts as the virtual mediator of the blessings of salvation. Instead of making the relation of the believer to the Church depend on his relation to Christ, it makes his relation to Christ depend on his relation to the Church.<sup>1</sup> It may not be anywhere expressly affirmed that the Church is the central provision of Christianity, but it is certain that the doctrine of the Church dominates and colours the whole interpretation of the Christian dispensation.

The conception of the Church which underlies and governs Catholic thought is magnificent and impressive. The Church is conceived as supernatural in its origin; and this not only in the sense that it was founded by Christ, but also in the sense that it has a constitution which was given by revelation, that it reflects the order and the harmony of the heavenly world, and that it operates with supernatural powers and with supernatural sanctions. One in faith, in worship and in

<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube*<sup>2</sup>, Einleit. § 24.

government, it is contrasted with the separate and contending powers of earth, and with the chaos of schism and heresy. Holy in its end, its doctrine and its members, and evidencing heroic degrees of sanctity in the possession of the gift of miracles, it compels the reverence of the world even while the world hates and persecutes it. As Catholic, it links together a vast company otherwise sundered by time, race and speech. As Apostolic, it holds steadily on its course through the centuries, unalterable in its faith as in its government, and unaffected by the ever-changing thoughts and arrangements of human society. Its vocation or commission is nothing less than the perpetuation of the work of the Redeemer. It does not of course supersede the work of Christ. Its presupposition is that Christ, the eternal Son of God, laid the foundation of its work in His incarnation and His atoning death; that from Him came ultimately all power, authority and grace; and that as from Him all spiritual blessing proceeds, so to Him belongs all the glory. But in the present dispensation the Church, in large measure, has taken over the work of Christ. It is, in a real sense, a reincarnation of Christ to the end of the continuation and completion of His redemptive mission.<sup>1</sup> Through His Church He continues to execute the offices of a Prophet, of a Priest, and of a King. His prophetic office it perpetuates by witnessing to the truth once delivered to the saints, and by interpreting and determining doctrine with an infallible authority that carries the same weight and assurance as His own original revelation. It succeeds Him on earth in

<sup>1</sup> 'The visible Church is the Son of God as He continuously appears, ever repeats Himself, and eternally renews His youth among men in human form. It is His perennial incarnation.'—Möhler, *Symbolik*, pp. 332-3.

the exercise of the priestly office. It represents Him so completely in the priestly function of mediation between God and man, that even as there is none other name given among men than that of Jesus whereby we must be saved, so there is no covenanted salvation outside the pale of the visible organisation of which He is the unseen Head. It is further conceived that it represents Him as sacrificing priest by the perpetual repetition in the Mass of the oblation which He once offered upon the cross. 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass,' it is taught, 'that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; and this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.'<sup>1</sup> And finally it administers the kingly power of Christ on earth. It has an absolute claim to the obedience of its members in all matters of faith and duty, with the right and duty to punish the disobedient for the breach of its laws, and to coerce the contumacious. It is, indeed, recognised that there are other powers ordained of God which are authoritative within their own sphere; but when any dispute arises over boundaries, it is for the Church alone to determine the range of the conflicting jurisdictions, while upon all matters in which it claims jurisdiction its judgment has the character of finality.

The theory of the Church which has been sketched contains elements of truth which are readily recognised. The Church is divine in origin, and divine as the seat of a supernatural life and supernatural powers. The general idea that the Church is the body of Christ is apostolic. The end or vocation of the Church is to do the works of its Founder according to the nature

<sup>1</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. xxii. cap. 2.



of its powers and the range of its opportunities. The real questions at issue are whether the Roman Catholic Church as an organisation can be identified with Christ in the way that it asserts, and in particular whether it has been entrusted with the share which it claims in the continuation of Christ's mediatorial work.

1. The Roman Catholic Church, it cannot be denied, has faithfully represented Christ and His works up to a certain point. It has received an enduement of the Spirit of Christ, and it has sought to follow in His footsteps. It has preached faith and repentance for the conversion of sinners, it has a title which is not disputed to be called a nursing-mother of saints, and it has been a chosen instrument for practising and for commending to the world those works of mercy which Christ enjoined in relation to the poor and the sick, to strangers and captives, and to children. But it cannot be maintained that its imitation of Christ has been other than broken and imperfect. It has not consistently acted, through its representatives, as Christ would have acted. We cannot recognise the Christ who was meek and lowly in the pomp of the papal court; or find the Christ who refused to rebuke the disciple that was not outwardly of His company<sup>1</sup> in the Church which declares that beyond its borders there is no valid ministry and no guaranteed salvation; and least of all can we identify the Christ who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself<sup>2</sup> with the Church which has never scrupled to use force, when it was able to command it, to defend its cause and to overwhelm its adversaries. The spirit of the Papacy exhibits a real, but also a very human, assimilation and manifestation of the Spirit of Christ. It is of course true that there is a ministerial

<sup>1</sup> Luke ix. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews xii. 3.

Church which fulfils necessary and extremely important functions in witnessing to the Christian salvation, and in making it effective in individual lives ; but the Roman Catholic idea of the mediatorial Church puts more upon the instrument than it is qualified or entitled to bear. The radical religious defect of the conception is that it makes the sinner fall into the hand of man, rather than into the hand of the all-merciful God. We look to God for salvation, and we are referred to an institution which, in spite of its lofty claims, is too manifestly leavened and controlled by the thoughts of men like ourselves. It is difficult, moreover, to find it credible, or even plausible, that in the background of our Lord's teaching it was taken for granted that His followers would depend on the mediation of the Church, acting through a human priesthood, in their communion with the Heavenly Father. It is equally difficult to imagine that for St. Paul the unexpressed condition of the appropriation of the blessings of the Gospel was that, as a member of the Christian society, the believer would possess the ministrations of a sacrificing priesthood. The whole conception has its express canonical examination and condemnation in the Epistle of the Hebrews, which represents the central boon of the Christian dispensation as access to God, and contrasts the immediacy of approach in Christ with the way in which, under the old dispensation, it was fenced and cumbered by the office of a human priesthood.<sup>1</sup> The scheme of thought rests upon a tacit criticism of the original presentation of Christianity—to the effect that it made God too accessible, that it gave the individual believer too much freedom and privilege, and that it required to be amended by borrowing

<sup>1</sup> vii. viii.

from the restrictions and the machinery of the older economy.

2. If the Roman Catholic Church has fallen far short of representing Christ in the forms in which it is possible for the society to reflect His Spirit and to imitate His works, there is a strong presumption that its claim to represent Him in greater things is baseless and presumptuous. It has already been argued that its pretension to perpetuate His prophetic office with the endowment of the infallible Teacher is neither justified by its credentials nor rendered probable by the use which it has made of its powers. The assertion that it continues the priestly work of Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass for the sins of the living and the dead has been a standing offence to the sound religious instincts of Protestantism—suggesting as it does that what was accomplished by Christ was an unfinished work which yielded an incomplete salvation. Nor has it been easy to bring arguments at once natural and weighty enough to convince the rulers of Christian states that acknowledgment of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords involves the admission of the political claims of the Papacy.

In general, it is to be said that the conception of the mediatorial Church is an unwarrantable complication of the provisions of the Christian religion. It is a serious offence against the simplicity of the Gospel, and also a serious compromise of its freedom, its grace, and above all of the religious security which it provides, when it is supposed that there emerges the need not only of a mediator between God and man, but also of an ecclesiastical mediator between man and the Saviour.



## II

The second dominant feature of Roman Catholicism is the conception that salvation is bestowed by the application of grace through the mechanism of its sacramental system.

1. By grace is meant in this connection a supernatural energy which, proceeding from the being of God, enters into human experience, and renews, enlightens and sanctifies the soul. The peculiarity of the Roman system is that it regards this divine energy as administered and controlled by the Church, and as imparted by it, in the kinds and measures which are required by the changing needs of human life, through the channels of the seven sacraments. The religious problem is to make man just, and the chief means by which this is supposed to be accomplished is the infusion of grace in a series of sacramental acts which are adapted to the more important and critical phases of human experience. The process begins in the sacrament of Baptism, in which a full remission of sins is granted, and at the same time an inherent divine quality is imparted by which a man becomes a new creature and an heir of eternal life.<sup>1</sup> In the sacrament of Confirmation there is supplied a further special gift of grace which enables the soul to meet temptation with greater strength and constancy, and to begin the warfare as a perfectly equipped soldier of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The sacrament of the Eucharist is the standing provision of the spiritual food required by the soul for its nourishment and comfort, and serves as an antidote which 'frees it from daily transgressions and preserves it from mortal sins.'<sup>3</sup> It has

<sup>1</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. 7; vii. ; xiv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, sess. vii. ; *Cat. Rom.*, ii. 3, 2.    <sup>3</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. xiii. 2.

also the value of a propitiatory sacrifice which procures for the penitent the forgiveness even of heinous sins and crimes.<sup>1</sup> The sacrament of Penance, which consists of the three parts of contrition, confession and satisfaction, effects similar results to baptism but in a more laborious way.<sup>2</sup> It has a propitiatory value in procuring the pardon of particular sins, and also a sanctifying efficacy in recalling or restraining from an evil course of life.<sup>3</sup> The needs of a special vocation are recognised in the sacraments of Matrimony and Ordination. The former has the effect of uniting a man and a woman by an indissoluble bond, and of furnishing them with a grace of fidelity that fits them for their new condition. Ordination confers upon the priest an indelible character, and consecrates and sanctifies him for the exercise of his sacerdotal functions.<sup>4</sup> Finally, a universal want is met in the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which 'fortifies the faithful in the hour of death with a most sure defence,' while in it also the Lord affords 'relief to the sick, and graciously grants a remission of sins.'<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental importance of the sacramental system was expressly set forth by the Council of Trent in the declaration that it is 'through the most holy sacraments of the Church that all true justice either begins, or being begun is increased, or being lost is repaired.'<sup>6</sup> Certain sacraments are said to be necessary to salvation, so that without them, or at least without the desire for them, the grace of justification cannot be obtained of God.<sup>7</sup> They are the instrument by which God, the fountain of all grace, implants divine life in

<sup>1</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. xxii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, sess. xiv. 1 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, sess. xiv. 2; *Cat. Rom.*, ii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. xxiii. 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, sess. xiv.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, sess. vii. Proem.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, canon 4.

the soul. In general a twofold effect is attributed to the sacraments. They are 'ordained as a remedy against sin, and also as a means of perfecting the soul in those things which pertain to the worship of God according to the law of the Christian life.'<sup>1</sup> What is accomplished by them instrumentally is generally described as an infusion of righteousness which serves as a principle or power of holy living. The gift received in regeneration, which is made dependent on baptism, is described as 'the first robe given through Jesus Christ in lieu of that which Adam, by his disobedience, lost for himself and for us.'<sup>2</sup> Three sacraments of the New Testament—baptism, confirmation, and ordination—are conceived as conveying an indelible character, which is further defined as including spiritual power, and conformity to the likeness of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The sacraments, further, are declared to convey grace *ex opere operato*—through the act performed<sup>4</sup>—provided that they are administered with intention by a duly authorised minister. It is, however, to be observed that the meaning attached to the phrase *ex opere operato* in Protestant controversy is not admitted in Roman Catholic theology without important qualifications. It is popularly understood by Protestants to mean that the sacraments, if duly performed, invariably do an important spiritual work without any reference to the condition of the recipient, and that the mental attitude of the person acted on does not condition the benefits received any more than it affects the action of a drug upon the body, or the success of a surgical operation. But while this view was doubtless current among priests and people at the

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, iii. 63, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa*, iii. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vii. ; *De Sacramentis*, canon 8.



time of the Reformation, it was qualified by the doctors to this extent, that a sacrament only infuses grace if no impediment be offered on the part of the recipient.<sup>1</sup> The Council of Trent pronounces its anathema on those who say that the sacraments do not confer grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto.<sup>2</sup> But what is to be understood by the limiting condition? According to Bellarmine, in the case of adults the absence of the dispositions of a good will, faith and penitence constitute the obstacle which would prevent the sacraments from exercising their due influence. But it is more probably the intention of the system to conceive the matter negatively, so that where unbelief or an obdurate and evil will do not assert themselves, the sacraments convey a gift of spiritual life and power. It would seem that the Mass is the instrument of a wide diffusion of grace among a great mass of persons whose Christianity may be of a very passive and torpid kind. In infant baptism, regeneration is necessarily thought to take place without any sense of receiving or yielding to the infused grace, while the benefits of extreme unction must often be supposed to be conveyed to those who, so far as conscious life is concerned, are as good as dead.

2. It is not open to question that this sacramental system, which undertakes to provide so comprehensively for the varied aspects of the spiritual need of man, rests upon a foundation of spiritual fact. It is one of the assured verities of the Christian religion that the believing soul is the recipient of gracious gifts of an illuminating, renewing and energising kind which proceed immediately from God, and which are verifiable

<sup>1</sup> *Summa*, iii. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Sess. vii. canon 6. 'Gratiam ipsam non ponentibus obicem non conferre.'

as the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is also true that these are transmitted by a variety of channels and under a variety of conditions, and that they are often transmitted in ways which make little demand on the understanding, and which sometimes do not seem to operate through the understanding at all. When a man is conscious of a rise or fall in his spiritual temperature or powers which he interprets as an increment or diminution of grace, this is often connected with influences which affect the human constitution as a whole, or affect the spirit through its union with the body, and sometimes no explanation can be given except that a mysterious energy has been at work in the nether-springs of his being. In connection with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, there is a widespread testimony that it is a signal means of grace, the use of which is often accompanied by a mystic replenishment of the characteristic feelings and energies of the spiritual life. But all this may be granted, and it may yet be unproved—and indeed it may be a serious perversion of Christianity to assert—that the chief agency by which men are made righteous, brought nigh to God, and guided to their eternal destiny is a kind of spiritual substance which has been entrusted in ordered stores to the administration of the Church, and which it infuses into the souls of its members through the fixed channels of the seven sacraments.

(a) The sacramental scheme of salvation derives all its plausibility from the fact that in the perfect religion the conditions of salvation must be readily capable of fulfilment, and must bring the blessings within the reach, not of a small spiritual aristocracy, but of men in the mass. They must be conceived in the spirit of Him who said: 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

The sacramental view conserves the character of Christianity as the religion of universal destination, since no theory could be more level to common apprehension, or more eminently practicable, than that which requires men to submit to certain external observances, and which also makes those available for unconscious beings as they enter or leave the earthly scene. The theory is also reconcilable with the evangelical idea which is a vital note of the Christian religion, since it makes God the first cause of the blessings of which the sacraments are the instrumental cause,<sup>1</sup> while it also presupposes a signal magnanimity on the part of God that He should be thought to have accommodated the Gospel so strikingly to the weakness and the limitations of human nature. It is at other points that objections emerge which discredit this theory of salvation. The Christian religion is based on a lofty estimate of human nature as reflecting the image of God, and it is incredible that its method of salvation should be one which in the main seeks to mould and impress man through the constitution which links him to the animal creation rather than through the spiritual powers of mind and will that evidence his kinship with God. It is a valid objection which is discussed but not met by Thomas Aquinas that that which acts must be more honourable than that which is acted upon, and that contact with the body cannot purify the heart.<sup>2</sup> Nor does the theory consist with the genius of Christianity as the supremely ethical religion. Ethical perfection is the goal to which the individual is destined in Christ, and the balance of the evidence does not support the proposition that

<sup>1</sup> *Summa*, iii. 62, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* His chief argument is that as we chiefly sin because of the body we must be saved through the body.—iii. 61, 1.



where the saving provisions of Christianity are thought to consist essentially of a system of sacramental observances which infuse grace, ethical progress is most assured, and that there the ethical outcome is the most rich and fruitful. Rather is the observation repeated which was made by the Old Testament prophets, that mankind is prone to value ceremonial observances not as a means to, but as a substitute for, personal righteousness. In short, the regulated administration of grace attempted by the Church in the sacramental system largely fails to produce, and even hinders the production of, the fruits of the Spirit, while on the other hand these moral fruits are gathered largely outside of its administrative pale. It is also a weighty consideration that our knowledge of God as the Holy Spirit includes an incalculable as well as an assured element, and that it is a usurpation upon a realm of mystery to claim for the Church that it is entrusted with the power of discriminating between special kinds of grace, and of dispensing the gifts according to the kinds and degrees for which appeal is made by man.

(b) It would hardly occur to the unprepossessed reader of the New Testament records that the elaborated sacramental system of the Roman Church was a central feature of primitive Christianity. The records ascribe to Christ the institution of the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and these certainly filled a large place in the missionary work and in the worship of the primitive Church. But it is also certain that they were administered on the footing that there had been an antecedent hearing of the word, and a previous response of the soul in repentance and faith, and that the efficacy which they possessed as a means of grace was conditioned by the attitude that had

already been taken up towards Christ and His salvation. The whole perspective and tenor of the New Testament would need to be recast in order to give colour to the idea that appropriation of the chief blessings of salvation takes place through rites performed on the body. It is inconceivable that the work of our Lord would so largely have taken the form of a ministry of teaching if it had been His design that in the religion which He founded the gifts of God should be chiefly mediated through external observances. One large topic embraced in His public teaching was the conditions of entrance into the Kingdom; another was the conditions of growth in the righteousness of the Kingdom; and while something was said to the people about the need of disciplining the body, no hint was given them that practically everything would depend on the way in which they used it as a channel of sacramental grace. The passage in which Jesus, according to St. John, discoursed on this aspect of the matter was one whose whole point was that the conception of a literal eating of the flesh of Christ is a gross and unspiritual error.<sup>1</sup> St. Paul recorded his judgment of the perspective of the Christian system when he said that Christ sent him, not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> The Apostle certainly believed that a divine life and energy passed into the soul in communion with the risen and glorified Lord, but this conception stands at a wide remove from the notion of the infusion of grace *ex opere operato*. The Roman scheme, in short, is not a legitimate extension of the two simple and spiritual rites of the new covenant, but a reversion to the phase of the Old Testament religion, which attached pre-eminent importance to religious

<sup>1</sup> Ch. vi. 58-68.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians i. 17.

ceremonies. Its fundamental idea is at least related to the notion of magical efficacy which governs the lower religions. In this connection it is surprising to notice the welcome which has been given by some advocates of the sacramental scheme of salvation to the discovery of the anthropologists—that on the animistic plane of thought there is a conception of sacrifice which connects its efficacy with the eating of a sacred animal.<sup>1</sup> This conception of the crudest heathenism is not likely to have anticipated the deepest thought of Christianity.

### III

The third distinctive feature of Roman Catholicism is its attempt to find a place within the evangelical scheme of Christianity for the idea of human merit. The foundation of the system is indeed laid in the undeserved favour and initiative of ‘a merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously.’ It is also treated as axiomatic that what conditioned and rendered available for man the Gospel dispensation was the work of Christ, ‘who merited justification for us by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father.’<sup>2</sup> It is because of the merit of His Passion that the economy has been established under which sinners are made just by the infusion of grace.<sup>3</sup> But while the realm of Christian thought is thus bounded by an evangelical horizon, the particular provisions as to the appropriation of salvation are worked out in the interest of a

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 1890; W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. 7.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Cum ea renascentia per meritum passionis ejus gratia, qua justi fiunt, illis tribuatur.’—*Ibid.*, 3.



different theory. The governing conception at this point is that God receives sinners to the adoption of sons, and grants them remission of sins, on the condition that they have been made just by the infusion of 'the grace and the charity which are poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.'<sup>1</sup> It is explained that justification includes both the remission of sins and the sanctification and renewal of the inward man<sup>2</sup>; but when the question is more precisely formulated, it appears that it is the sanctification and renewal which are wrought by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace that are the real ground of the forgiveness of sins. The condition of the sinner's acceptance with God, in short, is that he has been made righteous through the influences brought to bear upon him in the gracious economy of the Gospel. The inherent personal righteousness which has been wrought in him, and the good works in which it finds expression, are properly meritorious, and merit further increments of grace, and at the last eternal life.<sup>3</sup> Further, acceptance with God, as expressed in the forgiveness of sins, is proportionate to the progress that has been made in righteousness. As justification in the sense of sanctification is partial and progressive, so are also acceptance and forgiveness partial and progressive. For the average Christian man, now, this entails disquieting consequences. It is possible for the saints to keep perfectly the commandments of God, and even to perform works of supererogation that constitute a fund of

<sup>1</sup> *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. canon 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. 7.

<sup>3</sup> 'Si quis dixerit justificatum bonis operibus, quae ab eo per Dei gratiam et Jesu Christi meritum, cujus vivum membrum est, fiunt, non vere mereri augmentum gratiae, vitam aeternam, et ipsius vitae aeternae, si tamen in gratia decesserit, consecutionem atque etiam gloriae augmentum, anathema sit.'—*Ibid.*, canon 32.

merit which ensures their easy entrance to heaven, and is also vicariously available to secure blessings for others. But in most cases the merits fall far short of qualifying for a full forgiveness. The process of becoming just is slow and is accompanied by frequent sin and backsliding; and there remains the expectation of a heavy load of punishment, whether in this world or in Purgatory, before admission can be gained to the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to this whole conception we may urge the Pauline criticism of the similar strain of the legalism of the Old Testament. The Apostle's criticism of that system was that, inasmuch as it made acceptance with God dependent upon the rendering of a perfect obedience, it did not create or warrant the sense of peace with God.<sup>2</sup> Roman Catholicism, it is true, does not base salvation upon a righteousness which is man's independent attainment, while, by carrying all back to the grace of God, it at least seeks to satisfy the apostolic test that 'boasting' is excluded.<sup>3</sup> But it is in the same condemnation in that it prescribes as the condition of a full salvation the performance of a task which no mere man has accomplished, and which is only credited by a stretch of magnanimity to the greatest of the saints. It does injustice, in short, to an essential moment of the perfect religion by representing it as the vehicle of an incomplete and insecure salvation. It so far bases salvation upon merit as to issue in the offer of a

<sup>1</sup> 'Si quis post acceptam justificationis gratiam cuilibet peccatori poenitenti ita culpam remitti et reatum aeternae poenae deleri dixerit, ut nullus remaneat reatus poenae temporalis exsolvendae vel in hoc seculo, vel in futuro in purgatorio, antequam ad regna coelorum aditus patere possit, anathema sit.'—*Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. canon 30.

<sup>2</sup> Romans iii. 20 ff.

<sup>3</sup> i. 16.

mutilated salvation, and to open up a gloomy and depressing outlook upon the future. It is the boast of Rome that it alone gives intellectual assurance to minds perplexed by modern doubts and questionings; but in regard to the no less important question of religious assurance—the question as to whether it is well with a man here and hereafter—it is itself responsible for an addition of oppressive doubts and fears. In the case of the Christian who is not of the number of the saints, there is—except after baptism—an outstanding balance of sins; this is reduced by masses, penances, and good deeds, but it is not extinguished; and at death the soul of the faithful, though to some extent purified and fortified by the last sacrament, journeys onward into the unseen—knowing, indeed, that it has escaped the portion of Hell, but not knowing what precise claim it will have on the divine clemency, or what agonies it may have to endure before it passes from Purgatory into the Paradise of the blessed. In its failure to proclaim the gospel of a present and full forgiveness of sin to those who repent and believe, and in withholding the sense of religious security attested by peace and joy, which is a legitimate demand of the religious nature of man, Roman Catholicism takes back the comfort which it promised in the easy and wrong way of sacramentalism, and makes a grave and harmful deduction from the principles which give Christianity its claim to rank as the religion of perfect deliverance.

#### IV

Roman Catholicism is a very complex phenomenon which is not sufficiently accounted for by the explana-



tions which are usually offered by its adherents or its opponents. It is not explained by the theory that it is the one true and authorised expression of the revelation of God through Christ, and still less is it disposed of by the theory that it is a great apostasy to which the Christian Church was seduced by the powers of darkness. As a system of faith, morals and discipline it has many different roots. It claims to be apostolic; and it remains faithful, as has been said, to the fundamental ideas of the Christian religion in respect of the nature and the source of salvation, and also in respect of its basis of divine grace and its ethical demand. But a variety of other factors have asserted themselves in the course of its development which have left a deep impress upon the system.

(1) There is an element of truth in what has often been said in recent times as to the influence upon it of racial genius. The same type of mind that created and shaped the Roman Empire had to do with the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, which, as a fact, succeeded to some extent to the aims and the power of the Empire. To the same influence we may also partly trace the formation of the religious ideal which imposed a rigid law of faith and morals upon mind and conscience, and which exalted obedience to ecclesiastical authority into a pre-eminent place among the virtues and the graces.

(2) Further, the dominant position which was given to the Church and its organisation in the Latin form of Christianity led to important consequences. When Christianity became institutional, it inevitably became possessed by a spirit which animates all institutions, and which up to a certain point is legitimate as well as natural. Every institution is bound to believe that its work is worth doing, and, as a means to getting it better

done, it pardonably welcomes whatever is calculated to protect its interests and to increase its influence and its efficiency. The rule of the celibacy of the clergy at least promised to give the Church a more devoted and obedient instrument; and it could not be regarded as a serious objection when, as in the practice of confession and of masses for the dead, a supposed religious or moral advantage was accompanied by an increase of the influence of the priesthood or of the wealth of the Church.

(3) The peculiar features of Roman Catholicism may also be explained in part by a law of survival and recrudescence. Reference has already been made to the modern analysis of the Roman system which finds in its provisions a synthesis of genuine Christianity with paganising and Judaising elements. 'Christianity,' says Schweizer, 'in making its way against Judaism and heathenism, had to make some transforming use of Jewish and pagan ideas and institutions—and it could do so because these were on the whole innocuous in the period of its victorious energy. As the Church developed in power and in worldliness, it admitted more and more of these elements, and brought them less and less under the influence of the Gospel, until in the age of the Reformation the traditional Church was full of elements which were intolerable to the reawakened Christian consciousness.'<sup>1</sup> That a law of reversion is operative in the religious sphere is undeniable. The old which has been displaced and seemingly overcome collects its forces with a view to issue a fresh

<sup>1</sup> *Die Christliche Glaubenslehre*, i. p. 7. The currency of this criticism is due to Schweizer, who had previously worked it out and defended it in his *Glaubenslehre der reformierten Kirche*, 1844. For other important contributions to the discussion see Baur, *Theologische Jahrbücher*, 1848 ff.; Schneckenburger, *Comparative Dogmatik*; Hastie, *Theology of the Reformed Church*, 1904, ch. i. ii.



challenge; and in the first encounters of the renewed struggle it often reasserts itself with success, and regains much of the lost ground. It is a familiar fact of individual experience which is typified in Lazarus coming forth from the tomb in his grave-clothes, with the difference that, instead of being laid aside, the grave-clothes may even be treasured and renewed. On the large scale the law is illustrated in the history of every great religion, and it might even have been predicted of the historical development of Christianity in so far as the responsibility for the custody of the heavenly treasure was entrusted to human agents.

(4) The deepest explanation of the peculiarities of the Roman Catholic system probably is that it was an attempt, partly conscious, partly unconscious, and on the whole an honest attempt, to make Christianity more effective and useful as a working religion. Paradoxical as it sounds, there is a large element in Roman Catholicism which can be traced to a root of Rationalism. The rationalistic note is the effort to accommodate the Christian religion more closely to the supposed dictates of the facts of the world and of common-sense; and there are many features of the Roman Catholic system which suggest an attempt so to modify revealed religion as to make it respond better to the wants of average human nature, and to constitute it a more satisfactory engine for the promotion of spiritual and moral well-being. In its peculiar features it is largely intelligible as an adaptation of Christianity to the very real limitations of the ordinary man. He welcomes the note of authority in religious teaching, and the Roman Church meets him with the claim of the infallible Church and its infallible organ. The paganising element in the doctrine of God has its explanation in the fact that monotheism



is too abstract, the Trinitarian dogma too abstruse, for the common people; and it was felt to be useful that their religious feelings should have more concrete and familiar objects in the Virgin Mother and in patron saints. It is an obvious fact, again, that normally the mind of the multitude is not much moved by ideas—it is much more easily interested in and stirred by pictures, symbols and sacred actions; and for this reason it might well seem that the sacramental system and the cognate ceremonies were a much more powerful religious instrument than the read and spoken Word, since language largely fails to make ideas understood, and fails still more generally when it seeks to effect persuasion by argument. And yet again, it is a supremely natural idea that our salvation to God depends in some way upon our merits. It seems, moreover, that the best prospect of making religion a real working force in human life is that it should operate with the principle, so widely effectual in the work of the world, that reward should be apportioned to effort and success, and that shortcoming should be punished in strict proportion to demerit. This may well explain why the Roman Church modified the simplicity of the evangelical idea; while its addition of Purgatory, whatever may be said on other grounds in support of the doctrine, at least appears to be demanded by the common-sense view that at death the fewest are meet for heaven, and that all but the best deserve a measure of punishment. In brief, the specific features in question are to be regarded, less as a selfish attempt to exploit human nature, combined with indulgent concessions to its weakness, than as modifications inspired by a sincere belief that, human nature being what it is, it was possible to make the Christian religion at once more energising

and more coercive as an engine for the promotion of purity and righteousness.

The observation that Roman Catholicism has close affinities with the legalism and sacerdotalism of the Old Testament religion enables us to understand how, in spite of its limitations and errors, it could serve a temporary use in the religious education of the race, and could be comprehended in the divine purpose. The account given by St. Paul of the Law, by which he described the essence of the Old Testament religion, was that it was an imperfect and transitory dispensation, but that nevertheless its peculiar features constituted a discipline which in its place and time was salutary and even necessary. Similarly it may well be believed that the Church which during many centuries was the chief representative of the cause of the Kingdom of God on earth had its providential place in the spiritual education of the race. In particular, when the western European races that were destined to lead the van of a later age were still in their intellectual and religious childhood, it may appear to have been an advantage that they were placed under the control of a powerful institution which dealt with them as a schoolmaster with children—demanding to be believed with implicit trust, and obeyed with unquestioning submission, and also seeking to make religion more level to their apprehension, more engaging to their affections, and more influential in the regulation of conduct. ‘No modern Church,’ says Flint, ‘is yet great enough to despise the mediæval Church—the Church which, with all its faults, was by far the mightiest and most beneficent agent in the formation of Christendom out of barbarism and confusion.’<sup>1</sup> It may also be regarded as a lesson of the

<sup>1</sup> *Agnosticism*, p. 483.

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Old Testament dispensation that there is a stage of immaturity at which human nature is unfitted to appreciate the grandeur of a system of pure grace, and when it is necessary to bring it under the pressure of a scheme of rewards and punishments. But the parallel with the Old Testament also suggests that the function of Roman Catholicism was to educate civilised mankind up to the point of discovering its own insufficiency, of rebelling against its claim of authority, and of welcoming a restatement of the provisions of the Christian religion which should operate with more spiritual conceptions, give a better grounded assurance of acceptance with God, and also prove a source of deeper and stronger ethical inspiration.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE GOSPEL OF PROTESTANTISM

IN view of the environment of a world of heathenism, and of an internal revolt against the Christian view of existence, it may seem surprising that a prolonged and envenomed controversy should have raged between two Christian systems which are in accord as to the ultimate reality, and which also occupy so much common ground in regard to the capital questions touching the destiny, the religious privileges, and the moral obligations of man. As a fact, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are in close agreement as to two-thirds of the Christian religion, while as regards the remaining third there is at least a common stock of fundamental principles.

We note, to begin with, a common conviction that Christianity has the value of a salvation, and a large measure of agreement as to what this salvation includes. In opposition to Pessimism they unite to testify that there is a sovereign good which is within the reach of man, and in opposition to Secularism they declare that its highest elements are spiritual boons which include reconciliation to God and the forgiveness of sins, the supernatural gifts of regeneration and sanctification, and the promise of an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance in the heavenly world. The modifications made at this stage by Protestantism were concerned with subordinate matters. It enriched the conception of the Christian blessings by at least a stronger theoretical emphasis on the fact that the Christian salvation is

present as well as future, and that it includes a social as well as an individual salvation. It also conceived of the eternal salvation in a way which reflected more fully the love and grace of God; since it detached it from the incubus of Purgatory, and thus robbed death of the surviving terror with which it had afflicted the believer. The theological basis of Protestantism differed little in its primitive period from that of the rival system. It was axiomatic for both that God is partially knowable through the general revelation in nature and in human nature, and that this knowledge was republished and also perfected in the special revelation contained in the Scriptures. The Reformers also heartily subscribed to the dogmas of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, as they had been formulated by the ancient Councils—not, it is true, because of the authority of these Councils, but because they were held to have interpreted correctly the revealed doctrines handed down in the Word of God. Melanchthon, indeed, in the first edition of the *Loci*, showed a disposition to treat the orthodox dogmatic definitions of the mysteries as largely non-essential; but he subsequently replaced them as an integral part of the revealed system; and it was a constant note of the Confessions, whether Lutheran or Reformed, that they professed a blameless orthodoxy on the points that had been at issue in the ancient controversies.<sup>1</sup> The critical work of Protestantism at this point was confined to the more careful fencing of the sphere of the divine against the intrusion of the creature which had taken place in the popular developments of Mariolatry and of the adoration of the saints.

<sup>1</sup> 'We condemn the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius, and such others, as either did deny the eternity of His Godhead or the verity of His human nature, or confounded them, or yet divided them.'—*Conf. Scot.*, art. vi.

But large and impressive as was the amount of agreement, it would be superficial to minimise the significance of the issues that were raised at the Reformation. The controversy hinged upon the question as to the means by which, and the conditions under which, the superlative blessings which are promised in the Christian religion, and which are guaranteed by the Christian idea of God, fall to be appropriated by sinful man. This is undoubtedly a religious concern of the utmost moment. The fundamental heresy is to disbelieve that there is a great salvation available, and a God who is able to make it effective, but we also go perilously and disastrously astray if we mistake the conditions under which we may claim it and make it our possession. It is not therefore wonderful that men wrangled fiercely with opponents who seemed to them to fail to understand how the Christian religion does its work, and who as the consequence of mistakes on this point were bound to hamper, if they did not altogether frustrate, the Gospel in its saving and healing mission to a sinful world.

The Protestant theory of salvation shared the pre-suppositions of the Roman Catholic scheme. It was held that salvation has its spring in the mercy and love of God, and its guarantee in His wisdom and His power, and also that the ground on which it rested was the work of the divine-human mediator, Jesus Christ. The antagonism developed in reference to the nature and importance of the supplementary provisions by which the redemption is applied.

## I

The conception of the mediatorial Church was discarded as an unwarrantable interference with the



province of Christ. A different theory was propounded of the nature and the marks of the Church. In opposition to the Romish view which identified it with the hierarchical organisation, presided over by the supreme pontiff as the vicar of Christ on earth, it was declared in the *Augsburg Confession* that it is 'the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught, and the Sacraments rightly administered.'<sup>1</sup> The definitions of the Confessions of the Reformed churches were similar, except that the due administration of discipline was commonly emphasised as a third note of the true Church.<sup>2</sup> The name of Church in its strict sense was sometimes reserved for the company of true believers, but the definitions quoted show that what was mainly in view was an organised fellowship which consisted essentially of, and derived its character from, its true and living members, although evil persons and hypocrites might also be found within it. A visible Church is implied in the reference to the provision of preaching and Sacraments, and still more in the addition of discipline, which was made in the Reformed Confessions. That a particular type of ecclesiastical constitution, or a probable claim to Apostolic Succession, is a further criterion of the true Church is nowhere indicated, and was on occasion even vehemently repudiated.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Art. vii.

<sup>2</sup> 'The notes of the true Kirk of God we believe to be the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's Word prescribes.'—*Conf. Scot.*, art. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. xvii., rejects 'lineal descent' as a false note. The Latin translation might make it appear that all that was denied was the necessity of the episcopate in the line of descent. 'The Jews gloried in the carnal succession, and they (the Papists) glory in the politic or ceremonial succession; and all is one thing. God send you knowledge and understanding.'—Balnaves on Justification; Knox's *Works*, iii. p. 461.

The Thirty-nine Articles here follow with docility in the wake of the Lutheran Confessions, specifying as the identifying notes the preaching of the pure Word, and the due ministering of the Sacraments.<sup>1</sup> The latter phrase does not point to Apostolic Succession and episcopal ordination as its presupposition, since other Confessions of the same family have made it clear that what was meant merely was that the Sacraments should be dispensed in accordance with the original institution, and annexed unto the word and promise of God.<sup>2</sup>

1. The modification of the conception of the nature of the Church, which substituted for the hierarchical organisation the idea of a spiritual fellowship, was accompanied by a very material reduction of the powers which had been ascribed to the visible society. The theory of the infallibility of the Church, enjoyed by it as representative of Christ in His prophetic office, was replaced by a modest doctrine of the *potestas dogmatica* of the Church. It was held to be its duty, which indeed is a main reason for its existence, to act as the witness and defender of revealed truth; and it was also held to be its duty, which is an obligation that no society can avoid, to declare the doctrines for which it stood, to condemn the contrary errors, and to settle the standard of belief and of character required of its ministers and its members. But while rightfully claiming for the Church authority to adjust the doctrinal terms on which it would accept of ministerial service and grant the privileges of its communion, it was made clear that the exercise of authority in defining its received doctrine involved no claim of infallibility, and that its decrees and determinations derived their strength from their accordance with the

<sup>1</sup> Art. xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. xviii.

Word of God.<sup>1</sup> This conjunction of ideas contained implications which were long ignored. If a church requires the acceptance of a detailed Confession, while yet protesting that the Supreme Judge by which all doctrinal questions are to be settled must be the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, it seems to be necessary either that such a church should hold an investigation from time to time as to whether the Confession is based on an adequate interpretation of Scripture, or that individuals should be allowed a measure of liberty within the debatable ground of theology. The necessity of some measure of personal liberty was recognised even by the scholastics of the seventeenth century. Turretin distinguishes between the obligations which a confession imposes upon a minister in his public teaching, and those which it imposes upon him *in foro conscientiae*. In his public work he is under an obligation not to attack the doctrine of the Church. In the forum of conscience he is bound by it only so far as it is perceived to be in agreement with the Word of God.<sup>2</sup> This seems to be a satisfactory working hypothesis, when the obvious addition is made that 'in the forum of conscience' the individual minister must be at least in substantial agreement with the doctrines set forth in the Confession of his church.

2. The claim of the Church to carry on the priestly work of Christ was still more drastically revised and modified. Objection was not of course taken to the general conception of the priestly character of the

<sup>1</sup> It could be added, with a show of deference to ecclesiastical authority, that the decrees and determinations of the Church, 'if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made.'—*Westminster Confession*, art. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, xviii. 30.



Church. This is involved in its access to God in worship, and in its offering to Him of the sacrifices of prayer and service. What was repudiated was the form in which it was given effect to in the Roman system, with a sacrificing priesthood interposing itself as a mediator between God and man. There are, it was held, two forms of priesthood under the Christian dispensation—that of the great High Priest, and the universal priesthood of believers who through Him draw near by a new and living way unto God. The ministry is a priesthood in that it shares in the privileges of those who are made kings and priests unto God, but it does not form a third type, and it is therefore improper to name it specifically a priesthood.<sup>1</sup> The objection was chiefly based on the consideration that a priesthood must have something to offer; and the description of the ministry as a priesthood meant for that period that one of its chief functions was ‘to offer unto God the Father a sacrifice propitiatory for the sins of the quick and the dead.’ In setting up an order of sacrificing priests, the Church had thrown doubt on the sufficiency of Christ’s work, and created a feeling of religious insecurity<sup>2</sup>; and the ministry was accordingly recalled to the function of preaching the Gospel, and administering the Sacraments according to the original institution.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Diversissima inter se sunt sacerdotium et ministerium. Illud enim commune est Christianis omnibus, hoc non item. Manet autem Christus solus sacerdos in aeternum, cui ne quid derogemus, nemini inter ministros sacerdotis vocabulum communicamus.’—*Conf. Helv. Post.*, xviii. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. xxii. In this article the religious objection is vigorously stated. ‘Which doctrine, as blasphemous to Christ Jesus and making derogation to the sufficiency of His holy sacrifice, once offered for purgation of all those that shall be sanctified, we utterly abhor, detest, and renounce.’

<sup>3</sup> *Conf. Helv. Post.*, xviii. 12.

3. For the claim of the Church to share in the kingly prerogatives of Christ there was also substituted a different type of thought. The Protestant Church, especially in its Reformed branch, continued to witness to the Kingship of Christ over the nations, and to the mind of Christ in relation to their laws and policy; but it was not asserted to be the right of the Church as the representative of Christ to enforce its understanding of His mind. Instead of the mediæval claim, we have in the Confessions a succession of chapters on 'the Civil Magistrate,' which treat his office with the utmost veneration, and defend him against the usurpations of a spiritual tyranny. In the new situation the question was not whether the Church should dominate the State, but whether it could maintain its own freedom as over against the State. In the Confessions of the Reformed group it is consistently held that the Church possesses spiritual powers which she ought to exercise without responsibility to any save her supreme Head, and that, on the other hand, it is the duty of the civil magistrate to do what in him lies to protect and cherish her, and to support her in the defence of pure doctrine, and in the repression of error and corruption.<sup>1</sup> The powers of the Church were held to include, in addition to the dogmatic power already referred to, the legislative power of 'setting down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His Church,' and also the disciplinary power which is exercised in the infliction of church censures.<sup>2</sup>

While the claim of freedom pervades the Confessions, and is asserted in the Thirty-nine Articles in

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Confession*, xxiii., xxx.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx., xxxi., xxxvi. More fully in Turretin, xiv. 30-2.

regard to the main spiritual functions of the Church,<sup>1</sup> there is evidence that this was valued, not as an end to itself, but as a means normally serving the end of safeguarding the truth and advancing the Kingdom of God. There was much of the Erastian in John Knox when the Church was on the wrong side and the civil magistrate on the right side. The *Westminster Confession* seems to contemplate a situation in which it would be the duty of the civil magistrate to restrain and reform an erring church in the name of the truth, and by the authority of the Word of God. It may be added that it is because unfettered action by the Church is not an end in itself but a means to the end of getting the Church's spiritual work done, and that the end may be largely secured without it, that the great Lutheran and Anglican churches have tamely submitted to so large an abridgment of their self-governing powers.

The Protestant revision of the conception of the Church and of the priesthood entailed a great diminution of the dignity and power of the institution, and of the prestige and influence of the clerical order. There is thus a strong *prima facie* probability that the Protestant Church was actuated by genuinely religious and ethical motives, since there is an inveterate natural instinct which prompts an organisation and its ruling caste persistently to magnify their prerogatives. It may indeed be suggested that the Protestant clergy made a virtue of necessity—that the change was due to the growing self-consciousness of the laity, which at length became strong enough to rebel against clerical pretensions, and to throw off the clerical yoke; and that the Protestant doctrine was shaped by clerics who were shrewd enough to realise the new situation,

<sup>1</sup> Art. xxxvii.



and servile enough to work out the new theory and frame an apology for their masters. What lends some colour to this is that the Protestant churches, divided and weakened as they were, had not the power, even if they had had the will, to resuscitate the older theory of Church and ministry. In some later developments of the Protestant theory of Church and State—as seen in the thirty-seventh of the Anglican Articles—politic considerations made themselves felt, and a show was made of justifying a compromising situation which it was found expedient to accept. But no such considerations can have influenced the protagonists of the Reformation. The antecedents and training of Luther, of Calvin and of many others, predisposed them to loyalty to the Church's interests; and if they took a line which seriously damaged the prestige and power of the Church, it was because they believed that the existing Church had seriously weakened, if it had not even broken, the power of the Gospel.

The fundamental question which arises at this point is whether the Protestant reduction of the functions of the Church and the clergy has diminished the effectiveness of the Christian religion as an instrument of spiritual help and consolation. It might appear that the Protestant Reformation is chargeable with having deprived human souls of spiritual aids for which they may legitimately look in the perfect religion. In connection with every great theological controversy we find it part of the credentials of a true doctrine that it strengthens the provisions of the Christian salvation, or gives a stronger assurance of its trustworthiness; and it might seem to imply a condemnation of the Protestant revision of the doctrine of the Church and ministry that, by its denial of the

infallibility of the Church, it diminishes the sense of intellectual security, and that by the rejection of priestly mediation it weakens the sense of religious security. No doubt the comfort derived from these claims is one of the elements in the spell which the Roman Catholic Church casts over many millions of souls. But from the purely religious point of view the Protestant gain was greater than the loss. The radical error of the Roman system was that the visible Church, which is human as much as it is divine, and which had become increasingly human, had largely thrust itself into the place of God and of the Saviour; and to the deeper religious insight it appeared that men were being invited and required to make the unsatisfactory venture of entrusting themselves to provisions and laws of human origin as the condition of attaining to the divine salvation. It was felt that the need of the soul was to press past the insecure earthly instrument, with its mediatorial claims and services, to the promises of God and to a finished work of the divine Saviour, and to look to God for the better assurance of truth and salvation which is given inwardly by the Holy Spirit of God. The Protestant revision, in short, was more than justified by the religious need of basing salvation on a purely divine foundation, and of dispensing with ecclesiastical machinery which was largely human in its origin and conception. It is to be added that while the Protestant Church has deliberately taken the lowlier position, and has even in some respects continued to see her prestige lowered, and the range of her activities narrowed, the great body of her ministry have had their compensations in accordance with a command of our Lord, and the promise therein implied. 'Who-

soever will be great among you,' said Jesus, 'let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'<sup>1</sup>

## II

Not less fundamental and momentous was the Protestant challenge of the sacramental system as it had been developed in the Roman Catholic Church, and made to appear as the great provision for the conveyance of the Christian salvation. The number of the Sacraments was reduced to the two which were of undoubted divine institution; and while these were held in high honour, both for the institution's sake and as a means of grace, they were displaced from their central and dominating position in the life of the Church, and were set in a truer relation to the other means of grace and to the other doctrines of the Christian system.<sup>2</sup> In particular the Reformers rejected the popular Roman doctrine as to the mode and the conditions of the efficacy of the Sacraments. The notion that they are effective *ex opere operato*—infusing grace into the soul by some virtue in them, and irrespectively of the spiritual condition of the recipient—was rejected as a degradation both of the Gospel and of human nature. It was held that in order to ensure the efficacy of the Sacraments as a means of grace, they must be conjoined with faith in the receiver; and further, as faith comes by hearing, it was necessary that the administration of the Sacraments should be

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xx. 26-8.

<sup>2</sup> 'When all is said,' remarks Luther, 'I will maintain that baptism is nothing but an appanage of the Gospel. They act preposterously in giving it the first place in preference to the Gospel or the truths.' For his detailed discussion of the Sacraments see *The Babylonish Captivity of the Church, Primary Works*, E. Tr., Wace and Buchheim, 1896, p. 294 ff.



accompanied by the use of the Word, and at the least by the words of institution.<sup>1</sup> For our present purpose it is unnecessary to discuss the different types of Eucharistic doctrine which emerged in Protestantism, ranging from the conception of the Lord's Supper as a badge and a bare sign to the resuscitation of the idea of a bodily presence and a *manducatio oralis*. On this head it may be said that the Lutheran doctrine is melancholy evidence that Luther was unable to maintain himself at the level of freedom from the letter to which he had risen in his earlier period. The Calvinistic doctrine of the Lord's Supper remained faithful in substance to the Protestant idea, while accommodating its language to some extent to a different type of thought. Calvin had no doubt that the believer by faith enjoys union and communion with the risen Lord, and he therefore had no difficulty in saying that this experience is repeated in the Sacrament. There is no evidence that he thought that the benefits enjoyed in the Sacrament are of a different kind from those received in the use of the other means of grace, and that they were not otherwise attainable than in the Sacrament—and this means that he broke fundamentally with the so-called Catholic view.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Damnant igitur illos, qui docent, quod sacramenta ex opere operato justificent, nec docent, fidem requiri in usu sacramentorum, quae credat remitti peccata.'—*Conf. Augs.*, art. xiii. 'It is not water that does (such great things), but the Word of God which is with and in the water, and faith, which trusts in the Word of God in the water.'—Luther's *Small Catechism*, iv. 3. 'The efficacy of a Sacrament depends upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept, authorising the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.'—*Westminster Confession*, xxvii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The same applies to the *Westminster Confession*, xxix. 7. In speaking of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, believers are said to 'receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of His death.' But this is the same experience which is elsewhere described apart from the Sacrament as 'accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.'—xiv. 2.

The characteristic Protestant modification of the sacramental doctrine, it has been said, was that it affirmed the efficacy of the Sacraments to be conditioned by the spiritual state of the recipient. The concession of Roman theology that the grace must at least not be resisted was deemed inadequate, and faith was required in its two forms of a knowledge of, and self-surrender to, the Gospel. But how can this principle be reconciled with the practice of Infant Baptism, which Protestantism in its main body agreed in maintaining? The Anabaptists argued, with much force, that the two positions were irreconcilable. Luther felt the difficulty so keenly that he left a choice of alternatives—that faith is after all not indispensable, or that it is wrought in the infant at the time of baptism.<sup>1</sup> The usual Reformed view was that children were to be baptised because they were within the covenant<sup>2</sup>—suggesting, and with real support in experience, that the faith of the Church or of the parents might be vicariously accepted as a ground of blessing. The *Westminster Confession* lays down that ‘the efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered,’<sup>3</sup> and while holding that the grace may be conferred on infants, it offers the suggestion that the normal course is that the benefits are received when at a later date the baptised come to possess faith. Only it is to be observed that to say that some baptised persons become regenerate, and that this may occur late in life, is an evasion, rather than an affirmation, of a doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

Important and far-reaching consequences have flowed from the action taken by the Reformers in shifting the

<sup>1</sup> *Larger Catechism*. Pt. iv., ‘Of Infant Baptism.’

<sup>2</sup> *Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> xxviii. 6.

centre of gravity from the sacramental system, with its suggestion of mechanical results, to a gospel which requires a spiritual response from mind and heart and will. It revolutionised worship: the central place, which had been taken by the Mass, was claimed for the reading and preaching of the Word in a context of prayer.<sup>1</sup> Nor does it appear that the Sacraments themselves have lost in efficacy or in reverential regard by being re-established in the new setting, and exhibited as working in dependence on the Word of the Gospel. The religious and ethical value of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was enormously increased by clear insistence on faith and penitence as the condition of spiritual benefit; for out of this doctrine grew the exercises of heart-searching and self-dedication in preparation for the communion, which in the best days of Protestantism were the nursery of its richest spiritual experiences, and also the starting-point of new and higher ventures in the moral life. It is true that the transference of the emphasis from the rites of the sacramental system to the truths and provisions of the Christian gospel had secondary effects which were no gain. It probably led to some exaggeration of the value of preaching in comparison with other elements of public worship; and it certainly led to much preaching of a kind which was neither accepted by the devout as spiritual nor by the cultured as intellectual. But the main idea was sound, that God in the Gospel appeals to what is highest in man, and its effect was to restore to the Christian religion, as well as to human nature, an imperilled dignity.

<sup>1</sup> This is expressed in the Ordination Service of the Church of England, in which the priest receives into his hands, not a chalice, but a Bible.



## III

The third cardinal feature of Roman Catholicism against which the Protestant attack was directed, and which for Luther at least was the fundamental error, and the chief offence against true religion, was that which has been described as the Judaising revival of a doctrine of human merit.

The doctrine in which the alternative gospel was summed up was the article of Justification by Faith. In his treatise on *Die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*,<sup>1</sup> Luther expounded this gospel under the two heads that a Christian man is one who has been made lord of all things by faith, and who also through love becomes the servant of all. In his first sermon preached at St. Andrews, Knox enlarged on the doctrine of Justification, 'comparing the scripture doctrine that man is justified by faith only with the doctrine of the Papists which attributeth justification to the works of the law, yea to works of man's invention as pilgrimages, pardons, and other such baggage.'<sup>2</sup> Later it became customary to describe it as the material principle of Protestantism—by which was meant, not indeed that all other assured doctrines were contained in it in germ, but that it was the crowning doctrine of the Christian system, and that which above all others was the power of God unto salvation. Its importance was expressed in various strong phrases: it was the acropolis of the faith, the test by which it was known whether a Church was standing in health and strength, or weakening and tottering to its fall.

The controversy as to Justification was to some

<sup>1</sup> *Primary Works*, E. Tr., 1896.

<sup>2</sup> *Works* (ed. Laing), 1846, 1; *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, i. p. 191.

extent a dispute about the meaning of a word. The Protestant took it in the forensic sense of being pronounced not guilty or accepted as righteous, while the Roman Catholic defined it as essentially the ethical process of being made righteous. The debate could not fail to be unsatisfactory when one disputant was discussing the conditions of pardon and the other was expounding a doctrine of sanctification. But the controversy was not purely verbal, since the Roman Catholic recognised under the name of the forgiveness of sins what the Protestant practically meant by justification, and the Protestant doctrine conflicted with the Roman conception of the scheme of forgiveness in several material points. The intention and effect of the Protestant corrections may be summed up by saying that they contributed, first, to enhance the value of the central boon of the divine favour and forgiveness, and secondly, to strengthen religious assurance by a more satisfactory account of the ground on which, and the conditions under which, the sinner is made partaker of the boon of pardon.

1. For the Roman Catholic conception of a partial and progressive forgiveness of post-baptismal sin which keeps pace with a gradual sanctification, and becomes complete after the discipline of Purgatory, there was substituted the idea of a present and full forgiveness. When God receives the sinner to pardon, He grants him a full remission of the guilt and punishment of all past sins. The notion that there is a balance of unforgiven sin standing to the account of the believer, which requires to be cancelled by good deeds, and to be expiated in Purgatorial fires, was declared to be a stumbling-block and a doctrine of devils.<sup>1</sup> Hence the

<sup>1</sup> *Apology of the Augsburg Confession.*

emphasis on the fact that Christ made expiation for *all* sins, and that God freely pardoneth *all* our sins. It was, of course, realised that justification is not followed by perfection, and that the justified fall again under God's displeasure; but with a renewal of faith and repentance there was promised a renewed and full pardon.<sup>1</sup> At death, it was conceived, the deliverance was complete from sin and sorrow.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore obvious enough that Protestantism in this particular responded to the desires and hopes of the religious nature by the announcement of an immediate and a more complete salvation. But at both points plausible objections may be raised.

(a) In the first place, the doctrine of an immediate and full forgiveness of sins seems to come into collision with hard facts of human experience. It does not appear that those who have the experience of being reconciled to God receive the forgiveness of sins in the sense of being delivered from all the penalties of former transgressions. The religious experience of reconciliation may supervene upon a life of flagrant wickedness; and for this penalties will often continue to be paid in the form of physical weakness and suffering, of the distrust or contempt of society, and of remorse for the loss of irrecoverable opportunities. It therefore appears that if the consequences of sin must in all cases be construed as punishments, the Protestant conception of an immediate and complete pardon is an untenable position. But consequences only possess the character of punishments in so far as they are an expression of the wrath of God. In the case that has been instanced the consequences of sin are interpreted by the filial faith of the penitent, not as a punishment, but as a chastisement

<sup>1</sup> *West. Conf.*, xi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii. 1.



which proceeds from the divine wisdom and goodness, and which has the purpose of inducing watchfulness, of drawing the soul closer to God, and of working for its good in conjunction with the other forces of the providential discipline of life.<sup>1</sup>

(b) Again, it is difficult to affirm with the same confidence as the old Protestant divines that, in the case of believers, death is followed by an immediate transition to perfected holiness and a corresponding bliss. Even if it be supposed that it was a purpose of revelation to throw light upon an intermediate state, the texts which are adduced in proof are partly irrelevant, and for the rest they are anything but clear and convincing. There is a real difficulty in supposing that the natural event of death brings about an immediate perfection which is not attained here through the spiritual influences of a glorified Christ and of the Holy Spirit; while analogy points to a continuity of character with the possibility at most of a spiritual advance which, though marking vast and rapid progress, would fall short by many degrees of absolute perfection. Moreover, if death be not followed by a complete cessation of sin, it may confidently be expected that it will continue to have its attendant shadow of sorrow. But even if it should be conceded that elements of the Roman Catholic doctrine are plausible, we should still be required to reject the theory of Purgatorial punishments. Amid the possible imperfections of the intermediate state we may be sure that the children of God would possess a self-communication of God, and a vision of the Saviour, which would swiftly carry them forward towards perfection, and would transfigure the remaining sorrows into palpable tokens of the divine

<sup>1</sup> Hill, *Lectures on Divinity*, ii. p. 318.

love. On the other hand it must be contended that the analogy of the faith is against the speculation of an intermediate state which requires us materially to reduce the expectations that have been formed of what is due to pardoned sinners from the love and grace of God.

2. The Protestant scheme of thought, besides promising a greater deliverance, also laid a stronger foundation for the Christian salvation, and gave a better reason for believing that its spiritual and eternal blessings were available for sinful men.

(a) The possibility of justification, with all the consequent blessings, was grounded on the work of Christ, which had its ultimate source in the gracious initiative of God, but which was also necessary to enable God, consistently with His justice, to open the gates of mercy to mankind. This general conception was of course common to the two systems. It was declared by the Council of Trent that 'the meritorious cause (of justification) is His most beloved only-begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, merited justification for us by His most holy passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly the Protestant Confessions speak of the sufferings and death of Christ as that whereby 'He made satisfaction for our sins,'<sup>2</sup> 'made a full satisfaction for the sins of the people,'<sup>3</sup> 'took upon Himself the sins of the world and satisfied divine justice.'<sup>4</sup> The Protestant emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ had a certain polemical purpose—the design being to exclude and discredit the supplementary sacrifice of the Mass, which was declared to be 'blasphemous against Christ's death, and the ever-

<sup>1</sup> *Sessio*, vi. cap. vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Augs. Conf.*, art. iv.

<sup>4</sup> *Conf. Helv. Post.*, ii. 15.

lasting purgation and satisfaction purchased by the same.’<sup>1</sup> But the doctrine also represented a deep religious interest. Though the Confessions do not handle the doctrine of the Atonement with any elaboration, it is clear that the sufferings and death of Christ were conceived by the framers to have been substitutionary and penal. They not obscurely express the conception that Christ bore the penalty to which a sinful race was liable under the government of a righteous and holy God, and that in consideration of the vicarious punishment which He endured, the necessity was removed for inflicting it upon the guilty. ‘He being the clean innocent Lamb of God,’ to quote one of the clearest witnesses to a doctrine of penal substitution, ‘was damned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the tribunal seat of our God; and He suffered not only the cruel death of the cross, which was accursed by the sentence of God, but He also suffered for a season the wrath of His Father, which sinners had deserved.’<sup>2</sup> In the later period there was a further development of the theory which seemed to be required for the fuller support of a doctrine of justification. It could readily be conceived that the effect of the penal sufferings of Christ was no more than to procure for the sinner a sentence of acquittal, and that the sinner requires to plead in addition positive merits which will secure the fullest measure of the divine complacency and favour.<sup>3</sup> The distinction drawn by Anselm between the active and

<sup>1</sup> *Conf. Scot.*, art. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, art. ix.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Perfect obedience to the law seems just as necessary as the ground or basis of a virtual sentence of approbation and reward, as satisfaction is as the ground or basis of a sentence of forgiveness or immunity for further punishment.’—Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 1862, ii. 48.



passive obedience was accordingly revived, but a different use was made of it—the sufferings being conceived to be imputed for the forgiveness of sins, the active obedience for approbation. The *Westminster Confession* seems to treat the obedience and sacrifice as a whole,<sup>1</sup> which as an undivided whole avails for the satisfaction of justice and for acceptance; but in the Reformed as well as in the Lutheran theology much was made of the twofold bearing of the passive and active aspects of the atoning work of Christ.

It is not possible to affirm with the confidence of the older Protestantism that revelation includes not only the fact of an atonement, but also a theory of the atonement—viz. the theory that the sufferings and death of Christ were efficacious because they were the punishment of sin which He endured in our room and stead. The mode of the efficacy of the Atonement is a question which was handed over to the theological mind with a commission to work out a theory on the basis of the revealed facts. But even if the doctrine of penal substitution be regarded as only one among several possible theories, we cannot but appreciate the intensity of the moral earnestness which it presupposed, and also its singular adaptation to meet a deep religious need. It has been criticised as unethical; but it may be doubted if a more splendid tribute was ever paid to the dignity and the claims of the moral law than in the conception that sin is so awful an evil and so shameful a scandal, and that it so entirely merits the extremity of punishment, that it was impossible for God to forgive it in the exercise of a paternal indulgence—that, on the contrary, mercy could only come into play when the appalling guilt had been expiated in the death of the

<sup>1</sup> viii. 5.

Son of God, who was also the representative of mankind. Regarded merely as a measure of the conception formed of the heinousness of sin, it has no parallel in point of moral earnestness in the speculative thinking of the schools. It is no less obvious that it met an intellectual need of the religious life. We feel more sure of the divine mercy if we think that we perceive the grounds on which God acted, and by which He was enabled to act, in the dispensation of mercy. The believing soul feels more sure that God forgives for Christ's sake if it knows why God forgives for Christ's sake. There are other answers to the 'why' which appeal more strongly to the refining mind, notably the conception which has some countenance in the *Westminster Confession*, that the true sacrifice was obedience, and that the ground of our forgiveness is that Christ offered to God, in life as in death, the sacrifice of a perfect obedience in the form of human service and under the conditions of human life. But it is still evident that there is no theory which is so intelligible as the theory of penal substitution; and that there is no religious message which has brought the same peace and solace to those who have realised the sinfulness of sin, and the menace of the retributive forces of the divine government, as the conception that the penalty due to sin was borne by the crucified Saviour, and that the guilty may be covered by the robe of His imputed righteousness.

(b) Once more, Protestantism strengthened the sense of religious security by its teaching as to the condition which must be fulfilled on the human side in order to the appropriation of salvation. 'They teach,' to quote the epoch-making article, 'that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits or works, but

are justified freely (of grace) for Christ's sake when they believe that they are received into favour, and their sins forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death hath satisfied for our sins. 'This faith doth God impute for righteousness before Him.'<sup>1</sup> The sole requirement was a faith which, while involving an intellectual element of knowledge, with assent, was essentially an act of will—viz. trust in the offered mercy of God in Christ. By faith alone sinners are justified—without account taken of their righteousness, even of that which may have been inwrought by Christ or the power of the Holy Spirit. Nor is this because of any moral excellence of faith. The *Westminster Confession* has become sensible of the possible abuse of the apostolic phrase, and protests that God does not justify sinners by imputing faith to them as their righteousness.<sup>2</sup> Faith, it was held, was singled out and honoured without reference to its ethical quality or potency. It was specially suitable because no boast can be made of faith any more than of the act by which the hand of a dependant grasps a proffered gift.

The doctrine of justification by faith has the merit of adequately meeting the conditions of the most urgent of religious problems. The capital religious problem is that stated by the prophet: 'What doth the Lord require of thee?' The Roman Catholic solution draws upon grace, but eventually it issues in this, that in the measure in which we have proved willing to make use of the grace of Christ for our sanctification we are assured of the divine mercy and favour. Our standing with God ultimately depends upon goodness of character and its expression in life. But it is evident that for the great mass of men this is a message of despair, since an achievement which at the best is clogged with sin and

<sup>1</sup> *Augs. Conf.*, art. iv.

<sup>2</sup> xi. 1.



stained by guilt can afford no ground of confidence. Even the saints can have no sense of security—rather they must experience an unrest and a fear proportionate to their greater sensitiveness of conscience. The reason why the doctrine of justification by faith was so ardently prized was that, grounding acceptance with God on the perfect merits of Christ, and demanding nothing but a humble and trustful faith, it laid down a condition which made it possible for sinful man to cherish a good hope of salvation. ‘If we ask,’ says Calvin, ‘by what means the conscience may have peace with God, we shall find no other means but that free righteousness be bestowed on us by the gift of God. Let even the most perfect man descend into his own consciousness, and call his doings to account; what issue shall he have? Shall he sweetly rest as though all things were in good order between him and God? And shall he not rather be torn with terrible agonies, when he shall see matter of damnation abiding in himself, if he be judged according to his works? The mind, if it looks Godward, must of necessity either have assured peace in accord with his judgment, or be beset by the terrors of Hell. Therefore we profit nothing in disputing of righteousness, unless we establish such a righteousness whereof the steadfastness will serve as a stay to our soul before the tribunal of God.’<sup>1</sup>

The Protestant doctrine of Justification is further commended by the fact that it carries out with thoroughness and consistency the principle of grace upon which the Christian religion is admittedly based. Roman Catholicism recognises that the mission of Christ and His redeeming work were solely due to the

<sup>1</sup> *Institutio*, iii. 13, 3.

unmerited favour of God towards the human race, but it shrinks from the admission that the principle which governed the divine action in relation to mankind as a whole also governs the divine dealings with the individual in the matter of the conveyance of salvation. On the authentic Protestant view, on the other hand, the economy not only began, but it is continued and it is ended in pure grace. In doing so it reproduces the Pauline conception of the gospel, according to which everything that lies between election and final salvation is referred to the undeserved mercy of God.<sup>1</sup> It also reproduces a central feature of the gospel of Jesus. It is true that there is a strain of our Lord's teaching which points to degrees of future reward which shall be proportionate to service. But in regard to this it may be observed that there are some forms of reward that necessarily grow out of service; and in any case the Protestant doctrine of Justification is certainly worked out in the spirit of Him who taught that the best have no claim upon God because of their goodness, and that the worst need not despair of His mercy.<sup>2</sup>

(c) Finally, it may be confidently affirmed that the Protestant doctrine of Justification by faith supports the mission of Christianity as an ethical religion. Superficially it seemed a dangerous doctrine, and inimical to the interests of morality, to say that what determines the relation of the soul to God is—not character and life, but faith alone. There is evidence that on the Protestant side the ethical outcome of the preaching of the gospel of pure grace was early felt to be somewhat of a disappointment. It was one of Luther's trials to find that the streams of charity were diminished by the abolition of the fear of Purgatory

<sup>1</sup> Romans viii. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvii. 10; Mark ii. 17.

and of the sacrament of Penance. It was the experience of John Knox that the congregation included many who reached no high standard of sanctity, and even left something to be desired in the matter of cleanly living and common honesty; and it may well be due to this that the *Scots' Confession*, while loyal to evangelical doctrine, gives little prominence to the doctrine of Justification by faith, and lays all possible emphasis on the necessity of being filled with the Spirit of Christ.<sup>1</sup> In the Lutheran Church a Romanising reaction took place, and was voiced by Osiander in the contention that the ground of justification is not so much Christ for us as Christ in us—the Christian character which is formed in the believer. In modern theology the same view has been resuscitated by various schools; and it is widely influential in popular thinking in the form that all which can count in the judgment of God or man is character, and that if faith be demanded it can only be as an important factor, and as a symbol, of a noble type of character.

It is, now, not open to dispute that if the ethical value of the gospel of Protestantism is to be tested by the characters and the lives of all who have professed the evangelical doctrine, it is somewhat seriously discredited. But it is no more unfair to judge a course of medical treatment by its effects on those who have not put it to the proof, than to judge the Protestant gospel by its effect upon those who have not tried it,

<sup>1</sup> More explicit testimony is borne by Leighton to the Antinomian tendencies of a later Scottish period of evangelical zeal. 'Remissionis sane gratuita, et justitiae imputatae, et dignitatis filiorum Dei, eique annexae haereditatis aeternae doctrinam libertissime audit, et densum humeris bibit aure vulgus: sed resipiscentiam homini christiano necessariam esse et cor novum, vitamque novam, carnis et mundi contemptum, jejuniam et preces, haec dictu dura, perpressu aspera.'—*Praelect. Theol.*, xv.



and who have not even understood it. Where it has been really understood and acted on, the result has been to produce, not perhaps the most gracious and lovable type of character, but one deeply conscious of spiritual realities, and also richly charged with moral energy. The scheme of Protestant thought took the strongest guarantees that justification will work out into sanctification. It was held that there is no true justification which is not accompanied by a renewal wrought by the Holy Spirit; and also that, though personal righteousness is not a condition of the divine forgiveness, it will appear in the final judgment as the test of whether the faith which claimed the promises of God had been a true and living faith, or hypocritical and dead. In particular, the doctrine of justification by faith as formulated and believed by the Reformers included three elements which generated a great store of moral energy. They had St. Paul's profound sense of gratitude to God for an immeasurable gift which constrained them to a response of obedience. 'Believers are not to perform good works,' to quote a single expression, 'to make satisfaction for their sins, but only in order to manifest their gratitude for the great mercy which the Lord God has shown to us in Christ.'<sup>1</sup> Again, the faith which was conceived as justifying was an attitude of the soul which necessarily entailed the richest moral consequences. It involved trust in a God who was both righteous and loving, and in a Christ who was all-holy as well as all-gracious, and such a trust as was demanded was inconceivable without a gradual assimilation to the likeness of the divine. Faith alone justifies, it was conceived, but it was also held that it never exists alone—or without its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Conf. Helv. Post.*, xvi.; *West. Conf.*, xvi.

bodyguard of the graces and the virtues.<sup>1</sup> Once more, it is certain that belief in an immediate and full remission of sin, while it might lead to moral apathy and laxity, could also generate a peculiar moral enthusiasm and energy. There is a wide difference between the position of the debtor who is struggling to overtake his obligations, and that of the merchant who, with ample command of capital, goes on from one successful venture to another; and the Protestant gospel gave the consciousness that the religious situation had been successfully coped with, and inspired the courage and the confidence which are needed for larger moral ventures and for successive victories.

It is not alleged that the doctrine of justification by faith received its perfect and final formulation in the old Protestant schools. It is cast to a large extent in modes of thought and expression which have since become uncongenial to many devout minds. It uses forensic language for the statement of truths that are capable of simpler and more convincing expression. It was bound up with a theory of the Atonement for which no higher claim can be made than that it is one of many contributions to the subject which have been propounded as supports of faith, and one which to many minds has brought light and comfort. But the substance of the doctrine is a permanent enrichment of spiritual knowledge. Its imperishable elements are the religious truth that God is an all-gracious God who, for the sake of the altogether worthy, accepts us in our unworthiness when we throw ourselves upon His mercy with penitent and trustful hearts; and its ethical value lies in the fact that this filial relationship to God is the

<sup>1</sup> *Formula Concordiae*, cap. iii.: Fides enim vera nunquam sola est, quin caritatem et spem semper secum habeat.

spring of the highest moral power and endeavour. It is a marvellous combination of simplicity with profundity —of adaptation to the weakness of human nature with due regard to the glory of God and the chief end of man. It can be accounted the perfect religious theory because it makes easy and light the conditions of salvation; and it is the perfect ethical theory because it introduces powers and engenders motives that capture and control the centre of the personal life, and that dispose and enable a renewed will to address itself with consecration to the greatest moral tasks.

#### IV

Protestantism is a complex historical phenomenon which has many different roots. Its rise and early diffusion were closely connected with a notable stage in the intellectual progress of the race. The recovery of the wealth of classical antiquity in the Renaissance, the widening of man's thoughts by discoveries in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, and the invention of printing as the means for the diffusion of the new knowledge, created a spirit which chafed under ecclesiastical fetters. It is also probable that the break-up of the feudal system, with the rise of the towns and of the middle-class, prepared a welcome for a type of Christianity which reflected in its institutions something of the democratic spirit. Still more evident is it that racial genius had much to do, if not with the moulding, at least with the reception, of Protestant Christianity. The map of Europe reveals that its spell has been generally acknowledged by a group of nations which includes the Germans, the Dutch, the Scandinavians, and the Anglo-Saxons; and that



its appeal to Latin and the Slavonic peoples has, on the whole, fallen upon deaf ears. As a fact, there are features of Protestantism with which the racial type which may be summarily described as Teutonic has strong natural affinities. The Teutonic mind is veracious—not readily tolerating what it suspects to be picturesque lies, and very intolerant of what it suspects to be venal lies. It is also liberty-loving; and as such it is disposed to revolt against assumptions of authority which are ill-founded, and to resent every invasion of individual rights. It is an industrious stock, and never really believed in the superiority of the idle existence which was idealised as contemplative. It has, moreover, a keen sense of justice and humanity, and is ill-suited to persuasion by physical force. It may be added that as this stock is naturally Protestant—in so far as Protestantism means the cause of truth, liberty, and justice, and as it professed Protestantism when it came of age, it is probable that it will remain Protestant in its great mass, and not least in its Anglo-Saxon division, so long as it preserves unimpaired its characteristic intellectual and moral qualities.

But when allowance has been made for these contributory factors, it remains true that the Reformation was essentially a spiritual phenomenon, and that its rise and diffusion call for a spiritual explanation. It had its rise in the experiences of men who were in earnest about the salvation of their souls, who had made proof of the Roman Catholic scheme of salvation and found it wanting, and who had discovered the peace and strength which they sought in a gospel that spoke to them out of the recovered Scriptures—giving to them an assurance of reconciliation with God, and a sense of victorious power over the seductions and the terrors of

the world. Protestantism has flung off many by-products that have enriched the intellectual life of mankind, has stimulated and modified its political life, and in various ways has advanced its material well-being; but the religious experience that underlay the genesis of the movement, and the similar experience which has been reproduced in later ages, have been the spring of much that is best in the higher life of the Western nations. Alike because of its general influence upon national life, its capacity of revival and renewal, and the quality of its best products of Christian character and life, it is not too much to claim that it rediscovered aspects of divine truth, and unsealed sources of spiritual power, which Romanism had hidden or obstructed.

1. On the other hand the history and the phenomena of Protestantism have given rise to grave misgivings. It may be asked, to begin with, whether it is not too lofty a form of religion for the use of the multitude. It calls the ordinary man to be a priest to God, it expects him to hold his creed as a personal possession which he has made his own in independent thinking and private experience, it appeals to gratitude for a heavenly boon as a motive of his moral activity, and it invests him with the gravest responsibilities in the exercise of his Christian liberty. And it is a serious question whether he be really sufficient for these things, and does not rather need to lean on an authoritative Church or priesthood which will relieve him of much of his responsibility by prescribing to him a creed and taking charge of his conscience. In such considerations there is no little force; as has been said, it was doubtless because of them that the Roman Catholic Church was permitted to act for centuries



as the schoolmaster and guardian of the nations of Western Europe. The Reformers themselves were not unaware of the limitations of human nature; and to Calvin at least it seemed that it was necessary to try to reconstitute the Church with a system of discipline so searching and effective as to ensure that the weak and the erring would be adequately tutored, governed and restrained. But the ecclesiastical ideal of Calvinism was not persisted in, and Protestant Christianity has developed a measure of liberty which can work out for the individual in any one of the many degrees that separate a sober and responsible Christian conversation from an unchartered licence of creed and life. At the same time it may still be true that Protestant freedom, with all its abuses, secures better results on the whole and in the long run than the attempt of Roman Catholicism to avert the abuses by maintaining the condition of tutelage. Protestantism courts for the individual worse disaster, but it also ventures for a grander issue, and it has been justified by its best results.

2. A further feature of Protestantism which has occasioned alarm in many minds is its tendency to schism. Within the first generation it broke up into the two divisions of Lutheran and Reformed; and the Anglican Church, though connected in doctrine with the Reformed branch, has increasingly asserted the independence of its standpoint, and has broken off communion with the other members of the Reformed family. While the Lutheran Church has on the whole held together, the Reformed has shown a tendency—and not least in Scotland—to minute subdivision. Is then, some are tempted to ask, the explanation just this, that the Reformation was a heinous sin of schism,



and that it has been punished, as is a common method of God, by permitting it to run its course in renewed outbreaks of the spirit of lawlessness and disorder? A more legitimate inference may be drawn from the phenomena of schism, and it is that Protestantism made the mistake of trying to carry on its Church life too much on Roman Catholic lines, and showed too little respect for the principle of liberty in which it itself had its origin. But there is no reason to think that Protestantism is doomed to endless subdivision and increasing chaos. It would appear to have finally and decisively entered upon the stage of reconsolidation. Apart from this it may be questioned if any considerable secession in England or Scotland was ever productive of more harm than good. The rise of the Wesleyan Church in England was God's evangelistic scheme for the religious awakening of England; the Disruption which gave rise to the Free Church was a providential scheme of Church extension to enable the Scottish Church the better to cope with the situation created by an extraordinary increase and displacement of the population as the result of economic prosperity and the industrial revolution. There are doubtless grave evils that make union the greater good of a new time, but as regards the past there is considerable probability that matters fell out according to the mind of Him whose first interest is the advancement of His Kingdom.

3. Another point which may excite still graver misgiving was raised by Froude in an essay on 'The Condition and Prospects of Protestantism.'<sup>1</sup> He describes it as a Samson shorn of his locks and fallen into impotence and disrepute. 'The Protes-

<sup>1</sup> *Short Studies on Great Subjects, New Series, 1888, vol. ii.*

tantism of the sixteenth century,' he says, 'commanded the allegiance of statesmen, soldiers, philosophers and men of science. Wherever there was a man of powerful intelligence and noble heart, there was a champion of the Reformation. . . . Some enchantment must have passed over Protestantism, or over the minds of those to whom it addresses itself, when science and cultivation are falling off from it as fast as Protestantism fell away from its rival.' The facts of course are not so bad as here stated. Protestantism, as concretely embodied in Churches, still elicits from among the best of the population a large meed of affection, loyalty and service. At the same time there is a measure of truth in the indictment, and in particular it would be hard to affirm that Protestantism as such makes anything like the same appeal to the generous and cultivated youth of the country as is done by other causes. It may be that this is because it is content to be eminently respectable and has largely lost touch with the heroic. But what, we may ask, could it have done on these lines? Might it have led the van of modern thought? That became the business of the specialised work of science and philosophy; and the sole duty of the Church in the matter, however imperfectly it may have been performed, was to look on at the extension of knowledge without fear, and to tolerate and assimilate the new when it was proved to be true. Should it have flung itself, in the spirit of the Puritan and the Covenanter, into the political sphere, to contend for the items of a theocratic programme? It may be so, but experience seems to show that when the Church intervenes in politics it is more likely to be dragged down to the level of party warfare than to lift up political parties to the level

of the Kingdom of God. Is it its present duty to embrace the cause of the masses, and amid democratic developments to proclaim the justice of the socialistic ideal? That would be courageous and wonder-compelling; but there are grave obstacles—most good Protestants believe that Socialism is an un-Christian system, and the modern Church is becoming more and more dependent upon the countenance and the support of the capitalist. In these circumstances it might seem that the Protestant Church struck out along the one line of ideal and heroic effort which was open to it when it flung itself into the missionary crusade of the nineteenth century, and found that, even in a seemingly irreligious age, the human heart could still heartily respond to a departure from the commonplace which was also a summons to noble service. There is also another line along which the next grand effort may be made. The main weakness of Protestantism, perhaps, has been that it has been able to elicit so little genuine self-sacrifice on the part of its members, and it is possible that there will next be a baptism of the Spirit in which men and women will give themselves in increasing numbers to do the work of Christ in a ministry of individualising service among the sorrowful and sin-stained multitudes that are gathered in the cities of our grimly crowded lands.

4. The future of Protestantism is viewed by many with doubt and fear. It has been thought to be a temporary compromise between faith and unbelief which is destined to disappear as the issues grow clearer. The Roman Catholic view is that the history of Protestantism is a rake's progress, which will end in complete spiritual bankruptcy. The downward course is thus sketched by the controversialist. 'In the first stage certain



ordinances of the Church are attacked, such as fasting, and the celibacy of the clergy; next, complaint is made that the cup is withheld from the laity, and on this ground the authority of the Church is impugned as being in conflict with Scripture. Denial follows of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. With this sacrifice and priesthood are thrown over, and thereafter there is no effective check upon the downward course until the last and fatal stage is reached—the denial of the Trinity and of the Divinity of Christ, and lastly sheer blasphemy.’ Of late, even some good Protestants have declared that the ultimate choice will be between Rome and religious insolvency: But it may be believed that the type of Church will continue to survive which makes it possible for a thoughtful and liberty-loving man to profess himself a Christian without the necessity of sacrificing his intellect on the altar of superstition, or surrendering his most cherished rights to an ecclesiastical tyranny. So long as endure the strength, the sanity, and the moral earnestness of those nations which first broke the power of the Papal tyranny, it may be believed there will remain a remnant, and more than a remnant, that will keep the safe middle road between the old superstition and the new religious Nihilism.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DISTINCTIVE TESTIMONY OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES

THE principles which have been expounded formed the common doctrinal basis of the Protestant Churches of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. These Churches fell apart into the two main divisions of Lutheran and Reformed, over against which the Anglican Church has since claimed to be a distinct type. It has been pointed out that the fundamental difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches included some difference of attitude and emphasis in relation to the peculiarities of the Roman system. To the Lutheran Church the stumbling-block of that system consisted particularly in its revived doctrine of work-righteousness, while the conscience of the Reformed Church was more outraged by the paganising spirit of Romanism. On the other hand, it has been suggested that it was an offence to the Reformed that the Lutherans retained so much that was tainted with an idolatrous leaven, and that the Lutherans were alienated from the Reformed because of their failure to appreciate fully the grace and liberty of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> These observations have some substance; and they might be illustrated from the ecclesiastical constitution, the worship, and the forms of Christian life that are met with in the

<sup>1</sup> Schweizer, *Christliche Glaubenslehre*, 1863, i.

two main types of Protestantism. But the real dividing principle lay deeper, and was of still greater religious importance. It was concerned with the most important of all matters in religion—the doctrine of God; and the distinctive contribution of the Reformed Churches was to assert in the most emphatic way a theological principle which seemed to them to be necessarily involved in the true conception of God, and also to form an indispensable support of an effective scheme of salvation. Judged by their public and avowed Confessions, the Reformed Churches conceived that their special theological mission was to strengthen and enrich the doctrine of God by affirming the principle of the divine sovereignty, and by drawing out the implications of this principle. ‘The principle of the sovereignty of God,’ it has been said, ‘is the ruling conception of the theology of the Reformed Church. Its fundamental idea is that the world, in all its parts and processes and stages of life, is the out-carrying in time of one divine plan, conceived in the eternal reason of the Godhead, and realised by creative power and wisdom and love.’<sup>1</sup> The article of the divine sovereignty was indeed no novelty. It was embedded in the Pauline Gospel, it was elaborated in the Augustinian system, and it played a considerable part in the earlier thinking of the Lutheran Church.<sup>2</sup> But Lutheranism, under the guidance of Melancthon, allowed it to drop into a secondary position, and finally hedged it with subverting limitations; and it was left to the Churches which acknowledged Calvin as their theological master to assert for it a fundamental position

<sup>1</sup> Hastie, *Theology of the Reformed Churches*, 1904, ch. iv.

<sup>2</sup> On the substantial identity of Calvinism with the Augustinian doctrine, see Mozley, *The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination*, 1855, p. 413 ff.



in the system of revealed truth, and to work it out with remorseless consistency to its logical conclusions.

This principle may be interpreted in different ways; and it includes a number of positions, of which some are hardly controversial, while others have been provocative of the extremity of theological acrimony. It expresses, to begin with, a truth which is not denied in any school of theology—viz. that the universe, and the world of men in particular, is subject to a divine government; and that this government is effective in respect that God carries out the purposes which He has formed, and prevents any hostile forces from frustrating His plans. But if we affirm that ‘the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,’ we seem required to believe that He exercises over finite wills a regulative influence, which, if it does not actually constrain them to act in accordance with His plan, at least conditions them by His permission, and restricts their action within fixed limits that make them contributory to His purpose. If He does not exercise such a control, it would seem that He abandons the universe to chance, in which case there is no certainty that His purposes will be carried into execution. This general conception, now, may be specialised so as to make the salvation of particular individuals the object of an eternal divine purpose.<sup>1</sup> To ensure that this saving purpose will be carried out it seems necessary to suppose that He so influences the minds and wills of elect persons as to dispose and enable them to conform to His design. On the other hand, it would seem that if election be a fact, reprobation is also a fact. If the reason why some

<sup>1</sup> ‘Deus ab aeterno praeordinavit vel elegit libere et mera sua gratia, nullo hominum respectu, sanctos, quos vult salvos facere in Christo.’—*Conf. Helv. Post.*, x.

attain to a state of grace and to eternal life be that God elected them, and made His call effectual by a gift of sufficient grace, it is difficult to deny that the case of others, who did not thus attain, has its explanation in the fact that God did not elect them, and that He did not take the steps needed to secure their salvation. With differences of emphasis this scheme of thought is embodied in the Reformed Confessions as belonging to the staple of the Christian system.<sup>1</sup> It is not, indeed, obvious that the Reformed Churches have continued to be conscious that the sovereignty of God is their distinctive tenet, much less does it appear that they glory in testifying to its truth. There was, however, better reason why it should have been magnified than why it should have fallen into disrepute, since it can be shown to be a real enrichment of the doctrine of God, and to strengthen the religious assurance which it is an acknowledged end of the Christian religion to confer.

1. It is evident, to begin with, that the general doctrine that all that happens is bounded by the will of God, and included in His promise—*i.e.* is foreknown and foreordained—is a vital postulate of Christian faith. If God be not able to ensure that His purpose will prevail, and that all enemies will rage and contend against it in vain, it is clear that the future history of the world, and of the cause of the Kingdom of God therein, must be wholly uncertain. In particular, it is evident that, in such a situation as that in which the Reformers did their work, the possession of this belief made all the difference between hope and despair, energy and paralysis. When men found themselves, as witnesses

<sup>1</sup> *Conf. Helv. Post.*, cap. vi., x.; Thirty-nine Articles, art. xvii.; *Canons of the Synod of Dort*; *Westminster Confession*, chap. iii.

and workers for God, confronted by overwhelming odds, persecuted, driven hither and thither, and menaced by the prison and the stake, what gave them courage to endure and fight the battle to the end was the conviction that all the issues were in the hand of God, that the power of the enemies of the truth could prevail no further than He, for His own wise and holy ends, permitted, and that at the last He would attest and vindicate His own cause by giving it complete and open victory, and by reducing its enemies to weakness and confusion.

‘This is the comfort of the believer,’ says Calvin, ‘to understand that the Heavenly Father doth so embrace all things with His power, that nothing befalleth but by His appointment; and that he is received into God’s keeping, and cannot be touched with any hurt of water or fire or sword, but so far as it shall please God the Governor to give them place. . . . And from hence proceedeth the boldness of the saints. . . For when they call to mind that the devil and all the rout of the wicked are so everywhere holden in by the hand of God as with a bridle, that they can neither conceive any mischief against us, nor put it in train when they have conceived it, nor can stir one finger to bring it to pass but so far as He shall suffer, yea so far as He shall command, and that they are not only holden fast bound with fetters, but also compelled with bridle to do service, here have they abundant springs of consolation.’<sup>1</sup>

2. The doctrine of the divine sovereignty in its special form of a doctrine of election met a still more pressing religious need. It gave an additional pledge of religious

<sup>1</sup> *Inst.*, i. 17, 11. Similarly the French Confession of Faith, ‘He restrains the devils and all our enemies,’ viii.



security to the believer. The assurance which was sought in the gospel of Justification by Faith was made doubly sure by a gospel of Election. The deepest reason, as we have seen, for the enthusiastic attachment of the Reformers to the doctrine of Justification was that by basing salvation on the finished work of Christ, and by making its appropriation independent of human merit, it banished the feeling of insecurity created by the Roman system, and gave a profound sense that the conditions of the problem of reconciliation to God had been fully met. But even from the evangelical standpoint something might seem to be wanting for security. Faith has many degrees—there is a little faith and there is the faith which removes mountains; in some moods it may even seem that faith has languished and died; and one may fear that his faith has never been vital and saving, that its unreality has been proved, and that even though he has preached to others he may himself become a castaway. It is therefore clear that it must give a powerful support to the religious life when the mind combines the doctrine of justification with a doctrine of election, and, believing that God has elected particular objects of His mercy from the foundation of the world, draws the inference that He apprehends them by an effectual calling, enables them by His Spirit to fulfil the conditions of salvation, guarantees that they will persevere in the state of grace, and promises that no power in earth or hell will pluck them out of His hand. This train of reflection is undoubtedly Pauline, and was only amplified by Calvin. ‘Neither yet is there any other where,’ says Calvin, ‘a ground of solid confidence. So Christ Himself teacheth, who to deliver us from all evil, and to make us invincible among so many dangers, ambushes and

mortal conflicts, promiseth that whatsoever He hath received of His Father to keep shall be safe. Wherefore we gather that they that know not themselves to be the proper possession of God shall be miserable through continual dread, and that they do very ill provide for themselves and for all the faithful who, being blind to these advantages which we have touched, would wish the whole foundation of our salvation to be subverted.'<sup>1</sup>

3. The doctrine of election, which was thus felt to be rooted in a religious necessity, also seemed to follow by logical necessity from other principles which were common to the Protestant scheme of thought. It was axiomatic that original sin had reduced mankind to a state of absolute spiritual inability, and the inference seemed unavoidable that if a man rose out of this condition of spiritual death and became a new creature it must be wholly the work of God. 'So totally are we fallen by nature,' says Toplady, 'that we cannot contribute anything towards our own recovery. Conversion is a new birth and resurrection a new creation. What infant ever begat itself? What inanimate carcase ever quickened and raised itself? What creature ever created itself?'<sup>2</sup>

There were, then, evident and cogent reasons why the Reformed divines should describe the doctrine of election as a most comfortable doctrine of the Gospel; besides which they could forcibly argue that it had sufficient Scriptural grounding to entitle it to be regarded as a revealed truth. It was admitted that it had its difficulties—that unless it were handled with circumspection it might carry the mind to the fatal positions

<sup>1</sup> *Institutio*, iii. 21, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, iii. p. 363, quoted by Mozley, *op. cit.* p. 5.

that God is the author of evil, or that immorality merely ranks as misfortune. But even if it had meant less to them personally, or if the risk of misconstruction had been greater, they felt that it would be an excess of presumption to ignore or belittle a truth which it had pleased God in His wisdom to make known. That the predestinarian scheme of thought has largely lost the sympathy of religious people, and has even sunk into some disrepute, is due partly to the fact that it did not prove so serviceable in the religious interest as was promised, and still more to the fact that it put a severe strain on other parts of the Christian system.

1. To begin with, it could be questioned if it really gives the religious assurance which is promised. Granted that it is a most comfortable belief that a Christian is of the number of the elect, it involves a somewhat arrogant claim which many a humble-minded Christian will be slow to make. How does he know that he is of the elect number whose salvation is included in the eternal purpose of God? In proportion to his earnestness he is likely to have misgivings, and if he begins to doubt it his condition will be one, not of uplifting assurance, but of paralysing despair. That the doctrine has produced such an effect in isolated cases is not open to doubt. But, on the other hand, it does not seem possible to deny that there is a type of religious experience in which the assurance of God's love and of apprehension by His mercy is absolutely established, and which may be earnestly coveted as one of the greater gifts.

2. The opposition which has been raised to the doctrine of election in Pelagianism, in Arminianism, and in an intermediate type of thought, has been due in large measure to the belief that the predestinarian doctrine



degrades men to the level of a machine. On the view in question, it is said, it is God who acts in the conversion and sanctification of believers, and the human being accordingly sinks to the level of the necessitated objects of the natural world which we have been accustomed to describe as things and to distinguish from persons. In short, the glory of man lies in his free will, and this system reduces his freedom to a fiction. The objection is somewhat invalidated by the observation that there is no general agreement as to what is involved in human free-will. Freedom certainly involves self-determination, but it is not obvious that this can be violated except by the interference of an alien power which compels us to do what we are resolved not to do, or prevents us from doing what we wish. But if the divine influence of grace be conceived as among the forces—such as heredity, education, the family and social inheritance—which go to make up character, and if the way in which it does its work, as has ever been held, is that it operates behind the will and creates free self-determination towards God and His service, it cannot fairly be maintained that this imports a viciously abnormal experience, and involves a degradation of man which must be likened to captivity or slavery.<sup>1</sup>

3. It is also contended that predestinarianism is unfavourable to the ethical life, and thus tends to frustrate a chief end of the Christian religion. If the doctrine of particular election was rooted in a religious motive—viz. the demand for a ground of religious assurance, the spring of the Pelagian and Arminian opposition was mainly a concern for the interests of morality. A person, it was said, either does or does

<sup>1</sup> *West. Conf.*, iii. 1.

not suppose that he is of the number of the elect. If he does, he will argue that as he is assured of final perseverance conduct does not greatly matter. If he does not, he will be reduced to despair and will think that conduct does not matter at all. But in the Calvinistic theory sufficient precaution was taken to guard against immoral consequences, since election involved election to sanctification as well as to faith in Christ, and where in place of holiness there was found essential wickedness, it was held to prove conclusively that the person concerned was not of the number of the elect. On the other hand, it was urged in most responsible deliverances that the elect might conceivably be an exceeding great multitude, and that one born into the realm of grace should be slow to think that he was an outcast from the divine mercy. Further, while in periods of religious declension, and in particular instances in all periods, the practical influence of the doctrine may not have helped morality, the general witness of history has been to the opposite effect. When Calvinistic thought has been in the ascendant it has been associated with an unusual manifestation of moral vision, enthusiasm and strenuousness.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the ethical results have not been most deeply impressive in those epochs which have magnified the autonomy and self-sufficiency of man as over against God, and which have mainly relied on the appeal to man to rally his moral powers and accomplish his own destiny.

4. It is a more serious objection that the predestinarian doctrine, as involving a doctrine of reprobation, seems to come into collision with vital elements of the Christian

<sup>1</sup> Froude, *Calvinism*, 1871. In a striking phrase of Dr. Dykes it put 'iron into the blood' of the peoples whom it apprehended.

idea of God. It is felt to be inconsistent with the divine justice that, while all men are alike guilty in the sight of God, a difference should be made in their eternal destiny as wide and deep as the gulf between a heaven and a hell. It has been customary to say that as there would have been no injustice in the punishment of all guilty beings, there can be none in the punishment of some guilty beings out of the number. Those who are saved are saved because of the mercy of God, while those who are lost perish because of their sins.<sup>1</sup> This is as true as to say that those sick persons who are saved by the skill and devotion of a physician owe their lives to him, and that those who die perish of their diseases; but in that case the physician does not escape censure if it can be shown that it was in his power to have treated and saved those who died. It is therefore impossible to say that the doctrine of the divine love is not affected, since on Calvinistic principles it is in the power of God to deal with all in the same way in which He has dealt with the elect. For *ex hypothesi* it is in the power of God, in virtue of the principle of irresistible grace, to save even the worst; and if nevertheless there is a part of the human race which is consigned to everlasting punishment, it seems to be only explicable on the assumption that the divine love is not perfect because it is not an all-embracing and an untiring love.

The tenet of reprobation has undoubtedly independent support in the facts of history and experience. It is undeniable that there are nations whose history and fortunes imply a principle of rejection, and the experience of individuals is also far from bearing out the idea that God deals with us on the footing of equality of treatment as respects moral and religious opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> Knox on Predestination, *Works*, vol. v.



It is also an undeniable fact that there are many who seem to live untouched and deserted by God. But phenomena and events which might be reconcilable with the justice and goodness of God when occurring in a preliminary stage might be incompatible with them if these were reproduced in a final and permanent result. It must accordingly be admitted that it is not easy to reconcile the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God with the notion of an eternal purpose of reprobation carried out into effect in everlasting punishment. It would appear to be one of the lessons of history that the Calvinistic system contains elements which are mutually repulsive. The doctrine of everlasting punishment may be retained—when thought rebels against making God responsible for it by a doctrine of reprobation, and relief is found in an Arminian or semi-Arminian type of thought. The other possibility is that the doctrine of election and of irresistible grace is retained, in which case it is natural to attempt the vindication of the doctrine of the divine love—which might be expected to suggest God's use of His power in the service of all—by calling in question the tenet of eternal punishment, and resolving reprobation into a temporary lack of privilege and of spiritual attainment. It is a curious circumstance that while Calvinism has become unpopular chiefly because of its identification with a grim and remorseless doctrine of eternal punishment, it is the only system which contains principles—in its doctrines of election and irresistible grace—that could make credible the theory of a universal restoration. There is some evidence that the path of movement in Reformed Theology will be found to lie, not in the dubious attempt to deny the causality of God in the foreordination of events and in the determination of

human destinies, but in the enlistment of the idea of divine sovereignty in the service of the idea of infinite love.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever may be the bearing of the Reformed principle on the ultimate questions of Eschatology—a region in which we have doubtless an illustration of the parsimony of revelation, there can be no doubt of the necessity of the doctrine of the divine sovereignty as the foundation of an optimistic view of the future history of the world. It was part of the strength of Calvinism that it believed that the Kingdom of God was destined to a great and glorious history on the stage of this world, and in virtue of this belief it was the inspiration of much that is counted heroic in the struggles of the Western peoples for civil and religious liberty, and also of chivalrous political action in the interests of justice and humanity. In recent theology, Lutheran even more than Reformed, increasing stress has been laid on the Kingdom of God as a central conception of Christianity—expressive of all that will be accomplished for mankind when it will be knit together in the bonds of brotherhood for the accomplishment of its varied tasks of civilisation and morality. But what seems clear is that there is needed, as a guarantee of the realisation of this vision, a conception of the rule of God as the head of this Kingdom which borrows more from Calvinistic than from Lutheran theology. The Lutheran idea of God leaves Him too little power in the management of the forces of our sin-bound world to justify us in contemplating the future of His Kingdom on earth with any very great

<sup>1</sup> Hastie, *Theology of the Reformed Churches*, ch. vi. 'The word of eternal hope seems to me the latest message of the Reformed Theology,' p. 282.

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confidence; and we shall hardly grow more optimistic except on condition that our theological thinking becomes more Calvinistic. The need of the world is that we shall put not less, but more, in the way of trust, expectation and claim, upon Him 'of whom and through whom and to whom are all things.'



## CHAPTER VI

### RATIONALISTIC THEOLOGY

THERE is a growing opinion that in the history of religious thought less importance attaches even to the sixteenth century and the Protestant Reformation than to the second half of the seventeenth century and the rise of Rationalism.<sup>1</sup> For while Protestantism merely involved the readjustment of a view of existence which continued to be based upon a supernatural faith, Rationalism broke in principle with the supernatural scheme of thought, and asserted its title to rule over an ever-extending realm of knowledge without any obligation to render homage, and to pay tribute, to a divine authority.

The claim thus made was to a certain extent legitimate, inasmuch as there are wide fields to be investigated by history, by science and by philosophy, in relation to which Christian theology has no message that bears the stamp of revelation, and also no vocation and title to control the results of rational inquiry. But a different question arose when the attempt was made, in the name of reason, to define the content of Christian experience, and to revise the doctrines in which Christian faith had expressed its understanding of the source and the provisions of the Christian salvation. The process

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Troeltsch, article 'Protestantismus' in the encyclopædic *Kultur der Gegenwart*.

was heralded by Socinianism ; and it culminated in a far more radical breach with the Protestant Scholasticism which, in the sub-Reformation period, had constructed the most elaborate systems of doctrine, and had imposed them upon the Churches with a virtual claim to finality. During the two subsequent centuries theological Rationalism has been unweariedly engaged, now in the criticism and disintegration, now in the reinterpretation and reconstruction of religious doctrine. Our present task is to try to define the general characteristics and drift of the rationalistic developments of theology, and to estimate the bearing of the proposed emendations upon the purpose and the efficacy of the Christian religion.

As has already been indicated, rationalistic theology is of two main types which agree in method, but differ somewhat widely in results. While it is agreed that the theological task is to separate the kernel from the husk by the application of a rational test, there has been considerable diversity of opinion as to the range of the temporary and the permanent elements of historic Christianity. Popular Rationalism includes in the religious blessings the boon of immortality, and guarantees it by affirming the Christian idea of God, while it throws over as irrational or unethical the specific Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement. The philosophical type has sought to maintain some of the discarded dogmas—especially the substance of the dogma of the divinity of Christ ; but it has usually been somewhat indefinite as to the nature of the religious blessings, and in some of its later developments it has seriously endangered the whole scheme by tampering with, and even subverting, the Christian idea of God.

## I

The tenets of popular Rationalism do not require a lengthened exposition. It shed the peculiar conceptions by which Socinianism continued to render homage to supernatural religion, and it developed into the prosaic theology of the Rationalismus Vulgaris. The best representative of the standpoint in dogmatic theology is Wegscheider, whose system, though showing some trace of the influence of modern philosophy, has its chief source in the observations of a common-sense and commonplace mind upon the nature and provisions of the Christian religion.

1. In this type of thought the dominant place among the religious blessings was accorded to immortality. It was not indeed conceived as a specifically Christian privilege, for the natural immortality of the soul was supposed to be established by philosophical arguments, and it was maintained that good men outside of the Christian pale were heirs equally with Christians of the bliss of heaven. For the rest, the boons enjoyed under the Christian scheme included a conditional promise of divine favour and forgiveness. Christianity was conceived of as essentially a system of moral and religious instruction, which guides to a knowledge of the divine will, and disposes to walk in the paths of virtue. Moral character was regarded as all-important, but the great experiences by which it is built up—which it might be agreed to describe as conversion and sanctification—were treated as human attainments. There was no recognition of grace in the form of a supernatural energy. When the word was retained, the reality was resolved into the rational and moral endowments



which man has derived from his Creator, the moralising and consolatory energies which spring from an intelligent understanding of the Christian religion, and the salutary influences of the Christian home, the school and the Church.

For the attainment of the religious blessings, among which immortality counts as the chief gift, this type of theology relies upon the general theistic doctrine which underlies the Christian system. In the doctrine that God is almighty and all-wise, all-righteous and all-good, it finds sufficient ground for confidently expecting providential protection in this world, the pardon of the sins which stain the purity even of the noblest character, and the final boon of everlasting life. It is held that the additions made to the sphere of the Godhead in the ecclesiastical doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ are superfluous and injurious. There is one God, the Father. In Jesus Christ there is recognised a prophet from God who taught a system of true religion and lofty morality, and who enforced His message by a singular example of piety and virtue, though He did not in any way transcend the limits of humanity. The Holy Spirit is the divine influence by which God, in the use of educative and disciplinary means, and always without prejudice to the freedom and dignity of the creature, promotes our growth in virtue and true religion. The doctrine of a vicarious Atonement is conceived to be unnecessary in view of the divine mercy, as well as immoral in its general conception, and demoralising in its practical tendencies. The theory of the conditions of salvation has been already indicated. The service which God requires is righteousness, and only on the footing of a realised personal righteousness does He accept the sinner, while to

those who are substantially good He grants forgiveness of the sins due to human weakness, provided that this is sought in penitence and with purpose of amendment. To preserve some show of continuity with the Protestant tradition, stress was laid on the fact that the ground of forgiveness is not particular works, but the state of the heart, or the general tenor of the character, and the permanent attitude towards God and duty and the world of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

2. It cannot be denied, now, that deistic Christianity is a religion, that it is a working religion, and that it is an elevated form of religion. It is a religion, inasmuch as it casts upon God the burden of saving man from the destruction which threatens him in the grasp of the course of nature, and amid the changes and chances of the world. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century it has ceased to be describable as a mere abstraction. It probably represents the convictions of a larger section of the Protestant Church than has thought it necessary to make a Unitarian profession, and to build for itself a more congenial home in a separate ecclesiastical organisation. Nor is it possible to refuse it a high place among the religions of the world. In its doctrine of God, and in its conception of morality as the highest form of the service of God, it rises immeasurably above the religions of heathenism. It is practically the ethical monotheism of the Old Testament *minus* the burden of its ceremonialism, and the inspiration of its Messianic hope. But while it may be an improvement in some respects upon the legal system of the Old Testament, and certainly marks a great advance upon Mohammedanism, it is a seriously impoverished version of the Christian religion. Its fundamental defect is that

<sup>1</sup> Wegscheider, *Institutiones Christianae Theologiae Dogmaticae*.

it under-estimates the Christian blessings—that it makes upon God a claim which is too small in view of human needs, and also too small in view of the magnanimity of God. It is an utterly defective conception that, while we must needs depend upon God for the gift of immortality, our standing with God and the making our character are concerns which are remitted to ourselves; and that all which we need from God in order to attain the chief end of our being is comprehended in sound instruction, good advice and an impressive example. Man requires more than these aids if he is to rise above the experience of average humanity to the levels of spiritual experience and attainment of which he is conscious in his moments of deepest insight, and which have been reached by those who have expected greater things of God.

Popular Rationalism does not fail to do useful work both of a religious and a moral kind. Its doctrine of God is adequate to sustain the hope of immortality, and it exercises real moralising power. But it is still an open question whether the Christian idea of God as the Heavenly Father is capable of permanently maintaining itself if dissevered from faith in Christ as the unique Son of God, and from the experiences which are bound up with that faith. The realm of deistic thought was invaded during last century by more negative religious forces, and considerable weakness was shown in resisting them. It may also be observed that the displacement of Christ from a position of divine dignity has distinctly weakening consequences for character and life. It is incontestable, indeed, that modern Deism is an ethical religion. The stratum of Protestantism of which it is the operative faith is one which in the main adorns its faith with the staple virtues—which adds to the fear



of God industry and honesty, and to these domestic purity and brotherly kindness. With Unitarian Christianity there have also been associated types of character which have exhibited an impressive moral elevation and refinement. But, on the other hand, it does not seem to be open to doubt that loss of faith in a divine Christ entails very real loss in the quality and atmosphere of individual character, and that for the society it entails a diminution, not merely of religious zeal, but also of humanitarian energy. It cannot be a mere accident that those Churches which occupy the ground of Catholic faith or of Protestant orthodoxy have a practical monopoly of missionary enthusiasm; and while at least the philanthropic side of Christian missions might be supposed to make as strong an appeal to other types of Christianity, it does not appear that any large and serious attempt has been made, except by the Churches in question, to carry to the heathen the benefits of education, of disciplined labour and of the medical skill of the West. The presumption is that that is not in the line of the true development of the Christian religion, which makes it seem less worth propagating, and also less of a power for ministering to our pain-stricken and sorrow-laden world.

## II

The constructions of Christian doctrine which have been essayed by philosophical Rationalism differ from those of the popular type in that, while more or less critical of the doctrines of natural theology, they show a sympathetic appreciation of the specifically Christian dogmas, and find in them a large deposit of rational truth. They take, as was already pointed out, two main directions. One type follows the lead of Kant in interpreting

Christianity as essentially a contribution to ethical theory and an aid to virtuous living. The other, following the path of Hegel, values Christianity as substantially a popular version of metaphysical truths. The general attitude may be best illustrated by a brief account of the treatise in which Kant, who to some extent had been anticipated by Spinoza, set the precedent of sympathetic patronage which has influenced all modern philosophical groups save only those which represent the extreme left of religious philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

## I

1. Kant concurred with the contemporary Deism in holding that the cardinal boon for which we are driven back on God is immortality. At this point also his scheme of thought was governed by an ethical interest. His general conception may be roughly expressed by saying that because morality is, immortality must be, and because immortality is, God must be. Next, he clearly perceived that the individual blessings which historic Christianity had described as conversion or regeneration involve more than reformation of life and progress in virtuous living, and also that they present more difficulty than had been imagined by the optimism of his generation. To take the last point first, moral attainment is less easy than is popularly assumed, since the truth has to be recognised which theology asserted in its peculiar way in its doctrine of original sin. The universal prevalence of sin is a fact, and sin appears among men in every degree of cruelty and meanness. The enmity of nation towards nation and the social struggle for wealth and power are facts which protest against the theory of man's essential goodness. Even in the sphere of friend-

<sup>1</sup> *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1907, Bd. VI., *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*.

ship, it is scarcely a libel on human nature to say that we instinctively dislike those who have placed us under obligations, and that we find something not altogether displeasing in the misfortunes of our friends.<sup>1</sup> From the universality of sin he argues—here reproducing a theological commonplace—that there must exist in human nature a radical bias towards evil. The cause of the prevalent sinfulness must be sought in an instinctive tendency, rooted in human nature as such, to adopt evil maxims as the germinal principles of our actions. And this radical evil requires a radical change of heart if we are to attain the chief end of our moral being. The programme of a gradual reformation of life is inadequate to the needs of the moral situation. What is required is a change in which a man breaks fundamentally with the evil principles, and adopts a new attitude towards existence and duty.

‘For a man to become good,’ he says, ‘not merely in a legal but in an ethical sense, and to gain the approbation of God, is impossible through a gradual reformation so long as the basal principles remain impure. It can only be effected through a revolution in the disposition. The man can become a new man only by a kind of regeneration, as by a new creation and a change of heart.’<sup>2</sup>

In this passage Kant also recognises that, in addition to the fundamental boon of a new heart, there is a specifically religious blessing which man instinctively and legitimately seeks. This is the filial relationship to God in which he becomes the object of the divine complacency, and is assured not only of His favour, but of His abiding protection.

We have next to note his view as to the provision which is disclosed in the Christian religion for the attain-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.



ment of these blessings. For immortality, as has been said, our only hope is in God as apprehended by faith. For the realisation of our chief end, which is moral perfection resting on a new birth and reached through a long course of development, we possess aids which have found striking expression in the dogmas of the Church. The dogmas are partly descriptions of the moral ideal, partly an account of the factors which enable us to realise it.

The fundamental doctrine is that of the Son of God as the Saviour of the world. By the Son of God Kant understands primarily the good principle or the moral ideal. The name is also applied to mankind in so far as it embodies and is controlled by the moral ideal.<sup>1</sup> This Son of God, the idea of a moral humanity, came down from heaven, and was incarnate in the measure in which it was realised on earth, and was exposed to humiliation and suffering. In a special sense Jesus Christ is conceived as the Son of God, inasmuch as He most perfectly represented the good principle, or the ideal humanity, both in labour and suffering, while in comparing ourselves with Him we have also the most useful criterion of our moral standing and progress.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'That which alone can make a world to be the object of the divine decree and the purpose of creation is mankind—the uniquely rational beings of this world—in its absolute moral perfection. This ethical humanity, the man well-pleasing to God, is in Him from all eternity; the idea proceeds from His own being; it is so far no created thing, but His only-begotten Son, the Word through which all other things exist, and without which nothing was made that was made. For it was for His sake, for the sake of the rational beings of the world, so far as conceived according to their moral destiny, that all things were made. He is the image of His glory. In Him God loved the world. And it is only in Him and by the appropriation of His Spirit that we can hope to become children of God.'—*Ibid.*, p. 60, 1.

<sup>2</sup> The miraculous, in Kant's view, was quite superfluous as a means of accrediting morality, but he felt piety enough towards Christ to leave open the possibility of the supernatural in His person. 'It

The doctrine of the Atonement means that the new life involves the death of the natural man, and that the new man has to suffer for the sins which were committed by the old in the period of unregeneracy.<sup>1</sup>

In harmony with the foregoing conceptions, Kant interprets the necessity of faith in Christ as the condition of salvation. In the first place it is shown that faith in the eternal Son of God, conceived as the moral ideal, is necessary in order to entrance upon and progress in the truly moral life. Unless we believe that the ideal is authoritative, that it is attainable, and that it is destined to be realised in ourselves, we shall be lacking in the courage, energy, and endurance which are needed to raise us out of our low natural estate.<sup>2</sup> But the way in which, in the last resort, it helps us is by making us rally our powers to meet the supreme moral demand. Regeneration through the use of our own powers is unintelligible, but it is not therefore impossible. 'If the moral law demands of us that we become better men, it follows unavoidably that it must be possible for us so to become.' Further, when the moral state is reached, which consists in a right disposition of heart, and which may be described as faith in Christ, we have attained a moral standing in which one may be assured of the divine forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> When the heart is right, God, who

may be that the person of the teacher of the universally valid religion is a mystery, that His entrance into and His departure from the world, His labours and sufferings, were purely miraculous, only do not let us suppose that belief in miracles has anything to do with procuring the favour of God.'—*Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 'This idea gives us power to rise to the ideal of moral perfection.'—*Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> 'Moral progress towards perfection, because of the disposition from which it is derived, is judged by the searcher of hearts as a completed whole of conduct, and so a man, in spite of his enduring



sees the end from the beginning, accepts the self-surrender to the ideal, which has taken place in principle, as the promising beginning which is an earnest of a finished character and obedience. And the test of this right disposition may fairly be sought in the example of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

2. Kant's exposition of the essence of Christianity gives him occasion to set forth a number of ethical truths which are also very important truths. Nor is it wanting in religious insight, inasmuch as he recognises the need of the religious heart for a sense of divine approval and forgiveness in addition to the self-approval which is conveyed by a good conscience. But it is evidence of the thoroughness with which the realms of Christian thought had been explored in earlier centuries, that when we penetrate to the substance of his scheme we discover that the great independent thinker has merely reproduced a type of thought which had already vainly sought recognition in the Christian Church as Pelagianism. And it is to be added that Kant rendered Pelagianism not more but less credible by discrediting the main presupposition on which it was founded.<sup>2</sup>

(a) Kant's doctrine is Pelagian in that he conceives that the individual blessings comprehended in the

shortcomings, may expect to be well-pleasing to God at whatever point of time his existence in this world may be cut short.'—*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>1</sup> 'With a practical faith in the Son of God (so far as He is represented as having assumed human nature), a man may hope to be well-pleasing to God, and thereby to be saved. He, that is to say, who is conscious of such a moral disposition as to believe and entertain a well-founded confidence, that under similar temptations and sufferings he would unchangeably conform to the archetype of humanity, and faithfully copy His example, such an one, and such an one alone, is justified in regarding himself as a not unworthy object of the divine complacency.'—*Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> 'He will have no gospel, and no scheme of morals ever stood more in need of one.'—Oman, *Problem of Faith and Freedom*, 1906, p. 186.



character and religious standing of the new man are to be won by the exercise of the powers which form the normal endowment of human nature. But he left himself in a very unfavourable position for reaffirming this doctrine by his foregoing destructive criticism of the Pelagian assumption of the essential goodness of human nature. He admits that it is absolutely inconceivable how man, in view of the corruption of human nature, can achieve a self-wrought regeneration,<sup>1</sup> and he only believes it to be, nevertheless, a fact, on the ground that an ought ever implies a can. The misgiving which he felt is evidenced by the fact that, in more than one passage, he indicates it as a possibility that human ability may mean no more than ability to do our best and so to qualify for receiving a higher gift. 'It must be possible for us,' he says, 'to become better, even if that which we are able to do should be of itself insufficient, and all that we could do was to make ourselves receptive for a higher assistance of an inscrutable kind.'<sup>2</sup> With this concession he rediscovers the semi-Pelagian type of thought. As a fact, the nature and range of human need justifies us in making the larger claim upon God which has been made in the evangelical theology derived from Paul through Augustine; and the line of religious progress certainly does not lie in expecting less of God than even the saints have been proved to need.

(b) The required help for attaining our chief end is not supplied by the moral ideal to which he substantially reduces the doctrines of the Person and Work of Christ. The truths which he exhibits as the kernel of the dogmas are of great importance in the

<sup>1</sup> 'How it is possible for a naturally bad man to make himself a good man entirely baffles our thought, for how can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?'—*Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

moral life as sources of inspiration, energy and perseverance. But the real question is whether all the force that works through and in connection with these dogmas is the power which is resident in ethical ideas. Were Christ no more than the symbol or ideal of moral perfection, the symbol would indeed continue to be one of the most useful and precious of the intellectual possessions of mankind. But the power which He has exercised in history was evidently due to the fact that He was believed to be much more. We can test the influence of ethical ideals in other times and in other spheres ; and the result is so meagre, when placed in comparison with the spiritual life that has been engendered and nourished by faith in Christ, that it cannot be matter of surprise that Christians believe themselves to be in touch with a vital force in the person of a living Christ who communicates to other persons out of the fulness of a divine life.

(c) In his view of the subjective conditions of salvation Kant contributed nothing new. He appreciated the profundity of the ideas embodied in the doctrine of justification by faith ; and he made the addition, which had been anticipated by a caveat of Protestant theology, and by an Arminian doctrine, that faith justifies because of its ethical content and potency. When this ground is taken we have reverted in principle to the theory of justification by merit against which the Reformation uttered its strongest protest in the interests of peace of conscience, and from the desire of a greater sense of security in the relation of the soul to God.

## II

Hegel's treatment of Christian theology was conceived in an even more conciliatory spirit. He

declared that religion is the chief source of human bliss, and that Christianity is the absolute and final religion. 'All things,' he says, 'which have value for man and win his respect, in which he seeks his happiness, his glory, and his pride, have their centre in religion—in the thought, the consciousness, the feeling of God.'<sup>1</sup> But it had fallen, he said, upon evil days. Was it alleged that philosophy corrupted and destroyed theology? It could be fairly retorted that modern theologians had left little to corrupt or destroy. They relegated dogma to the background as if it were something to be ashamed of, or they transformed it beyond recognition, or even contented themselves with a detached historical account of the spiritual wealth of their more fortunate predecessors. 'The dogmas have become very thin and shrivelled,' he says, 'though theologians seem to require more words than ever in expounding them.' It is, in fact, not open to doubt, that Hegel believed it to be his mission at once to reassert the fundamental truths of Christianity, and to act as its apologist to the world of modern culture. For Hegel Christianity was essentially a matter, not of ethical truth and discipline, but of enlightenment in regard to the relation of God and man. This appears in the account that is given of the essence of the chief religions of the world, and of the nature of the final religion. The former are interpreted as preliminary stages in which there prevailed a one-sided and defective view of the relations of the Infinite and the finite; and the perfection of Christianity

<sup>1</sup> *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. 1901, p. 2. 'All peoples,' he adds, 'know that it is in their religious consciousness that they possess the truth, and they have ever regarded religion as that which gives dignity to their being, and as the Sunday of their life.'



consists in the fact that in it man comes to himself in the realisation of his union with God.

There is a difficulty in valuing Hegel's interpretation of Christianity, not only because of the abstruseness and intricacy of the system of which it forms a part, but also because of the ambiguity upon certain points which are of cardinal importance in any investigation of the nature of a religion. There is, first of all, a doubt as to his conception of the content of the Christian salvation. Do the blessings include the possession of salvation in a never-ending conscious life, or are we to be content with a life which is eternal in quality, and whose continuance is a possibility not worth discussing? The second ambiguity touches a matter even more fundamental. While Hegel regarded the doctrine of the Trinity as the last word of divine and human wisdom upon the being of God, he left to his disciples the problem of deciding whether the authentic conception of the divine being is that which regards Him as a personal being—capable of knowing and loving His creatures, or that which denies to Him personality in any other sense than that we and other finite beings are persons, and that the first cause may fairly be described in terms of what it has produced. On this question of interpretation, Strauss<sup>1</sup> and Hutchison Stirling<sup>2</sup> took opposite sides, and it is difficult to be convinced that Strauss had not the best of the exegetical argument. Once more, Hegel places the Incarnation beside the Trinity as a sublime and imperishable truth. But here again it is matter of dispute whether the incarnation is to be conceived as

<sup>1</sup> *Christliche Glaubenslehre*, 1841, Bd. I. Cf. M'Taggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, 1901, ch. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *The Secret of Hegel*, 1898, p. 720. 'There is for Hegel nothing but God, and this God is a personal God.'

racial—a self-disclosure of God in humanity, which was needed in its totality to give expression to the fulness of the divine idea, or whether the general incarnation in the race, realised more fully in its spiritual élite, culminated in a unique incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ. It therefore seems to be desirable, instead of attempting to discuss the views of Hegel himself, to refer rather to the detailed treatment of the substance of Christianity by members of later schools which, while acknowledging Hegel as their master, have pronounced explicitly on the points in question.

1. The right wing of the Hegelian school includes a number of Lutheran theologians whose work was influential in its day, but who have since passed into comparative oblivion. Most notable among these were Marheinecke<sup>1</sup> and Daub.<sup>2</sup> They were at one in affirming that the doctrine of the Trinity is the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, and they unfolded its content in essential agreement with the historic faith, and also as the support of the general Christian conception of the blessings of salvation. ‘The doctrine of the Trinity,’ says Daub, ‘is that which includes, comprehends and exhausts all the other doctrines of the faith.’ They hold fast to the essential content of the Christian salvation, and they find its grounding in a work of God wrought by Christ and appropriated through the Holy Spirit. The mechanism of salvation, if we may so describe it, is scarcely weakened except by the resolution into a deeper unity of the distinction of the natural

<sup>1</sup> *Die Grundlehren der Christlichen Dogmatik*, 1819. *System der Christlichen Dogmatik*, 1847.

<sup>2</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 1810. The imposing system of Rothe is indebted both to Schleiermacher and to Hegel. *Prolegomena zur Dogmatik*, 1839.

and the supernatural. 'Fundamentally,' says Daub, 'all that we call natural is supernatural, and what we call supernatural is at the same time supremely natural.' When peace is made on these terms, it may be added, it is commonly the supernatural which is found to be liable in a heavy indemnity.

None of the Lutheran contributions of this group surpasses in depth and grasp, as there is none which approaches in skill and beauty of exposition, the Gifford Lectures of the late Principal Caird. It may be thought improper to cite Caird as a representative of rationalistic theology since he heartily acknowledges the claim of revealed religion; but he at least represents the mediating type which refuses to draw the line between truths of revelation and of reason; while in the book in question the discussion of Christian doctrine is conducted exclusively on the basis that it falls to be judged by rational tests. In the detailed exposition there is no suggestion of materially reducing the sum of spiritual wealth which is claimed by Christian faith as possession or hope. The central blessing is conceived to be union with God, or the life of God in the soul of man; and though the conception of eternal life is declared to be infinitely richer and more rational than that of 'a mere survival of death,' a noble vindication is appended of the hope of personal immortality. The main difference that is felt at this point is a change in the centre of gravity—as seen in the fact that the topic of Justification is only incidentally touched on, and is overshadowed by the blessing of union with God. The theological basis of the Christian salvation, laid in the doctrine of the Trinity, is defended as an implication of the intellectual and of the moral life of the Godhead. The argument for a Trinity in unity as an implication



of the love of God is stated with perhaps unequalled power and persuasiveness. There is also a fresh attempt at the interpretation of the divine and human elements in the person of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Caird starts from the observation that in the human experience of love there is 'a blending of two self-conscious natures,' carries this over into the religious relationship in which man is united to God in trust and self-surrender, and finds that Christ, exhibiting as He did 'the absolute identification of the human mind and will with the will of God,' affords the perfect and unique example of this union. As he conceives the state of the question to be to explain what form of union is possible between two personal beings, while in the Catholic doctrine there is a postulate of two persons—the personality being there derived from the divine side, and the human nature regarded as impersonal—it may be thought that his interpretation is substantially a revival of the Nestorian conception.<sup>2</sup> In treating of the work of Christ, Caird sets aside the theory of penal substitution, and reproduces an amended form of the theory of M'Leod Campbell which regarded the oblation of Christ as resting on His sympathetic self-identification with the world of sinful men, and as consisting in a vicarious sorrow for the heinousness and havoc of human sin.<sup>3</sup> It is to be added that he construes the power of the glorified Christ as no mere ideal energy, but as a vital force continuing to work throughout the ages in the society which is His body.

2. The left wing of Hegelian theology is perhaps best represented by the systematic treatise of Biedermann.<sup>4</sup> His system contains a masterly sketch of Biblical

<sup>1</sup> *Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, ii. p. 100 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> p. 172 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, 2<sup>te</sup> Auf, 1884.

Theology and of the development of ecclesiastical doctrine, and this is followed by a critical dissolution of the doctrines in their ecclesiastical form, and by a speculative treatment of the residuum in the moulds of Hegelian thought. The outcome, it may be thought, is a Christianity which does not propose to do very much for man, and which is somewhat insufficiently equipped even for the accomplishment of the little which it proposes. Biedermann recognises that Christianity is a religion which is the vehicle of a salvation, and the content of this salvation is described by the use of the traditional terms. What it does for the individual is expressed in such words as justification, conversion, regeneration, sanctification and eternal life. But eternal life is not understood in the sense of a continued and everlasting existence which follows upon death. The belief in personal immortality, it is held, rests upon fallacious reasoning, and 'claims for the finite spirit that which constitutes the being of the absolute Spirit alone.'<sup>1</sup> 'Eternal life is not an existence of endless duration, but the attainment of a certain spiritual standing and condition; and it coincides with what is meant when we speak of being a child of God, or being in a state of salvation.'<sup>2</sup> As a fact, the Christian salvation is practically a single gift with a variety of aspects; and its nature is most accurately expressed as filial relationship to God. The man who knows himself to be a child of God, who is moulded by this principle, and who walks in the light of this knowledge, thereby reproducing the religious experience of Christ, is in possession of the all-comprehensive blessing of Christianity. 'The content of the idea of divine sonship is the content of the Christian principle: Christianity is the religion of divine sonship as it was

<sup>1</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, ii. pp. 656-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 658.

disclosed by Jesus for humanity, and at the same time the religion of the Kingdom of God as the divinely appointed goal of humanity.’<sup>1</sup> The state of grace is the result of a process which has both a divine and a human side, and although theological thought has distinguished between a divine judgment called justification and a divinely wrought condition of regeneration, these are really abstractions from the one concrete reality of divine sonship.

But even so it does not appear that the central and essential blessing of the Christian salvation is actually conserved. If we are sons of God—accepted and dealt with by Him as sons, and making to Him the due response of filial love and obedience—it might be supposed that this was still a great salvation; and the hope might be cherished that there was a fallacy in the argument discrediting personal immortality, and that a loving God might after all be depended on to bestow upon His trustful children the gift of an endless life. But when we examine the theological basis of the system, we find that the idea of God that is operative in it is one which is ill qualified to guarantee to the mind what is promised to the ear in the boon of divine sonship. Biedermann accepts the current criticism that personality is a finite conception, and that it cannot be legitimately predicated of the absolute spirit. ‘Only man as finite spirit is a personality. God as absolute spirit is not.’<sup>2</sup> It is admitted that we are entitled and even bound to represent God to ourselves in our religious moods as a personal being; but when we carry the question to the higher tribunal of pure thinking we are given to know that God is not a personal being—that He is only the causality, or *actus purus*,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547.



through which the world-process has come into existence and continues in existence. 'The absolute religious consciousness,' he says, 'in which the real divine-humanity consists is realised only as the pure spiritual life of loving communion between God and man, and this as fatherhood on the side of God, as sonship on the side of man. The nature of love is life in union with another; in the absolute religious self-consciousness the absolute spirit is the creative ground of a spiritual life which realises itself outside of Him in the creature (the Fatherhood of God), while man finds in the same the ground of his own being, and his life in the self-manifestation of God for him.'<sup>1</sup> But if the Fatherhood of God only means that He is the author of our life—including our moral and spiritual life—and if it does not imply that He knows us, feels for us, and wills our good, this amounts to so radical an impoverishment of the idea of the divine Fatherhood as taught by Christ and His apostles, that it would only be seemly to describe the destitute condition by another name than sonship.

Biedermann finds that the doctrine of the Trinity, which he calls the specifically Christian idea of God, contains a kernel of rational truth. The idea of God, as the absolute being, includes three moments. We may think of God as He is in Himself. We may think of Him as everywhere active in an eternal process of creation and providence—the work of the Son. Finally, we may think of Him as bringing finite spirits into union with Himself on the footing of the realisation of their divine sonship—the work of the Holy Ghost. But the modification of a Sabellian doctrine of the Trinity is somewhat small compensation for the loss of the living God.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 586.

Salvation, then, consists in the state of divine sonship, and the means by which this is induced is the entrance into history of the Christian principle. Biedermann repeatedly emphasises the contention that the essence of Christianity is a principle—viz. the principle of the destination of the finite spirit to life and blessedness in union with the absolute spirit, and that the great mistake which the Church has made is that it has identified this with the person of Christ. What is affirmed in the doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ is properly to be understood either of the principle above mentioned, or of individuals in so far as they have accepted the principle and realised it in faith and life. It is true that an abiding importance attaches to Jesus of Nazareth, in respect that it was in His self-consciousness that the Christian principle of sonship was first manifested. As the historical person in whom the principle of redemption was revealed, He may be called the Redeemer. But it is the principle, not the historical person, that has gone down through the Christian centuries doing the work of uniting man to God on the footing of divine sonship. It is a truth, not a person, that has been appointed to be the saviour of mankind.

### III

Theological Rationalism, as a system of thought which breaks with supernatural ideas, is confidently explained on one side as due to intellectual progress. On another it is traced to religious degeneration. According to one view it had its spring in a progressive enlightenment, which enabled the modern mind to rid itself of erroneous and superstitious ideas descending from Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages. Accord-

ing to the other it supervened on a decay of vital religion, it developed in boldness and hurtfulness as degeneracy continued to run its downward course, and it was checked and repelled in proportion as it encountered the forces of spiritual vitality and revival. Of these two theories it is the second which seems most closely to fit the facts of the case. The enlightenment theory derives some plausibility from the fact that supernatural theology had dogmatised about many matters on which it was found to have been in ignorance or error, and that it had made affirmations about the range of revelation, and the origin and nature of Scripture, which were discredited by assured results of historical and scientific investigation. But it cannot seriously be contended that there was so great a gulf—in respect of ability and knowledge—between the great Puritan and Anglican divines of the seventeenth century on the one hand, and the deistic thinkers of the eighteenth century on the other, as to explain why the former adhered to, and the latter repudiated, the principles and doctrines of supernatural religion. It must also be thought a surprising result, from the point of view of this theory, that the enlightenment when it arrived should have transformed the outlook of Toland and Tindal upon the order of things, while it left the robust mind of Samuel Johnson unmoved, and that it should have made so widely different an impression upon equally capable thinkers like Hume and Butler. The truer explanation must be that the seventeenth century as a whole possessed what the eighteenth century to a large extent did not possess—viz. the religious experiences which made it credible that a salvation was in the world which rested on a supernatural basis—and that in those cases in which the religious experience was perpetuated intellectual faith



in the Christian economy was easily able to maintain itself. The somewhat chequered history of theological Rationalism in the nineteenth century, while assuredly much affected by intellectual influences, is partly a reflex of the ebb and flow of the spiritual tides, and of an extraordinary variety in the types and degrees of modern religious experience.

That rationalistic theology does not draw its inspiration from religion, and may be expected to develop with the decadence of religion, is confirmed by the observation that in its general tendency it runs counter to the spirit of the religious view of things. The instinct of religion is to enlarge the scope of the blessings which are looked for at the hand of God, and to strengthen the provisions by which they are secured and safeguarded. This motive was evident in the patristic period, when the main concern of the Church was to prevent any tampering with the doctrine of the person of Christ which might threaten the foundation of the Christian salvation. It was also evident in the Protestant Reformation, which reasserted a Scriptural gospel that was welcomed because it contained larger blessings and more precious promises than the gospel of Roman Catholicism, and because it showed how the benefits could be more confidently claimed and more surely held. In rationalistic theology the drift is in the opposite direction. It tends to lower the conception of the nature and value of the blessings which are expected in religion, and it impairs the provisions on which reliance is placed for procuring the religious boons.

1. The root of rationalistic theology is the tendency to reduce the extent and content of the blessings which constitute the Christian salvation. It does not make

very great and solemn assumptions as to the actual or threatened evils from which man needs deliverance, and it makes a diminishing demand upon God for protection and help. That this should be so in a secondary religious period is natural and indeed inevitable. In the original and formative religious epochs men were conscious of mighty things having been wrought in them and for them, which could only be described by such heroic words as reconciliation to God, regeneration and sanctification. In a commonplace religious age men are not conscious that anything extraordinary has occurred in their experience, nor do they observe much that is deeply impressive in the characters and lives around them that bear the Christian name.

Upon this naturally followed a critical revision and reduction of the doctrines which had been felt in former times to be necessary to make the greater salvation effective. Smaller results call for lesser causes. When the blessings expected through the Gospel become shadowy or commonplace, there is no longer any apparent necessity to postulate acts and transactions on the part of God which seem altogether out of proportion to the end aimed at. This would appear to be realised first in the disparateness of an impoverished religious experience with the Christian doctrine of supernatural grace, as may be inferred from the fact that grace has sometimes been reduced to a natural quantity in certain theological schools which have yet not sought to tamper at other points with the theological fabric. It is felt that the phenomena to be explained are sufficiently accounted for by instruction in religious truth, and by the appeals which are made to the will through instruction and example; and that it is a gratuitous assumption to suppose a

series of inward miracles due to the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. With the decay of belief in the psychological miracle, belief in the Incarnation and the Atonement, in anything like their historical form, becomes at least unnatural. The doctrine of the Incarnation may be clung to in a variety of forms; but the conception asserts itself with growing force, that as the great instrument for the spiritual elevation of mankind is instruction, the essential significance of Christ is that He was the embodiment of an idea or a principle, while the Atonement also seems to have no other value save that of an idea and its illustration. As regards the topic handled in theology as the condition of appropriating salvation, there is increasing dubiety as to this mode of formulating the problem, and it seems best to take a stand on the position that the only thing which really counts is character. This may well be pursued as an end in itself; and if there actually be a religious problem—viz. how a man shall obtain the approving judgment of God—it is naturally thought that this problem also is solved by the possession of a character fashioned after a good ethical standard.

2. In the process of reducing the provisions of the Christian religion, the most distinctive feature is the tendency to substitute the power of ideas for the vital and vitalising energies proceeding from personal centres of divine life, as the means of raising men to a higher plane, and of furnishing them with the impetus to spiritual progress. This is at the opposite pole from the Roman Catholic system of thought; and even as in the criticism of Roman Catholicism it is necessary to emphasise that grace does not work apart from an appeal to the mind and will, so is it necessary to maintain, in opposition to Rationalism, that there is a divine power at work in



the spiritual world which is additional to, and even mightier than, the power of truth. There are obvious errors in the two extremes which make it appear that true religion should take the middle path, and regard the means of grace as consisting in a combination of true ideas and of supernatural energies. For if Roman Catholicism, which exaggerates the one side, tends to drift into the darkness of ignorance and superstition, Rationalism, which only recognises the other, tends to issue in spiritual weakness and listlessness.

Rationalistic theology has one very conspicuous merit, and there is also one valuable service which it permanently renders to the Christian religion. Its merit is that it is entirely honest, that it is impatient of make-believes, that it tries to see things as they are, and that it is trustworthy so far as its materials and its vision extend. It is for this reason that it enjoys a respect which otherwise seems disproportionate to the value of the teaching and the guidance which it has to bestow. The service which it renders is to act as a critic of the advantages which are promised to man by the religious instinct. The impulse of religion, as has repeatedly appeared, is to seek for the highest good in union with God, and to postulate a perfect provision for securing it; and while in this general expectation religion is justified, it is in danger of adding features of its own devising which have no solid foundation. It may therefore well appear to be an indispensable function of rationalism that it should check the unwarranted excursions of the religious imagination in the realm of its wishes by steady insistence that its affirmations shall be controlled by the principle of coherence, and also by the test of ascertained facts. On the other hand, it is evident that this type of

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theology easily exceeds its commission ; and it is found to exist in many grades, which form a descending scale, at the bottom of which religion is represented as forgoing its deepest intention and purpose, and is transformed into a few metaphysical tenets or ethical counsels which entail no considerable advantage to any, and no advantage whatever to the multitude. While philosophy has been able to weaken a religion it has never been able to make one ; and it seems that it should humbly regard its best thinking about God and divine things as secondary and second-rate in comparison with the ideas that emerged in the great periods of the Christian religion in a context of classic religious experience and of elemental spiritual power.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE THEOLOGY OF SCHLEIERMACHER

WE pass on to the consideration of the salient features of the distinctive type of modern theology which received its impress from Schleiermacher and Ritschl. The systems in question are profitably studied by way of comparison and contrast, for the work of Ritschl was to a large extent a sympathetic and critical revision of that of his predecessor. He has somewhere compared Schleiermacher and himself to two travellers by the same coach—adding that Schleiermacher occupied an inside seat, while he enjoyed a clearer and more extensive view from the box. The simile may serve specially to illustrate the measure of Ritschl's agreement and disagreement as to the source and norm of doctrine. While Ritschl breaks with the purely subjective method by his strong emphasis on the historical revelation in Christ as the source of theology, he at least holds that theological doctrines must undergo and pass an experimental test. The two are in accord in regarding Christianity as a historical datum which is entitled to give its own account of itself, and which may not, without detriment to the interests both of honesty and of utility, be transmuted into something different in a philosophical crucible. They occupied a similar position as critics of rationalistic theology, and



they were equally objects of suspicion and hostility to the representatives of the orthodox tradition of Protestantism. In relation to Rationalism they opposed the tendency which we have noted as its fundamental characteristic—viz. to reduce materially the number and value of the blessings promised in the Christian salvation. Schleiermacher's revulsion from Rationalism was largely due to a conviction, based both on observation and experience, that the Christian religion accomplished much more in believers than was credited to its account by the influential theologians of his period; and Ritschl's amendment at this stage was to the effect that it may be trusted to accomplish even more for individual believers, and especially for the race, than had been contended for by the founder of the theology of feeling. On the other hand, the criticisms made on the work of both by the conservative schools of theology were chiefly comprehended in the indictment that they seriously weaken the provisions by which the Christian salvation is guaranteed. It was admitted that they were not spendthrifts who, even as the rationalists, had prodigally flung away most of the spiritual wealth that had come to the world in Christ, but they were censured as decidedly imprudent or unfaithful trustees who had risked the wealth in very inferior securities. That Schleiermacher endangered the blessings of the Christian religion by tampering with their source and channel is a charge which is certainly well-founded. Whether Ritschl, while strengthening the provision, operated with a theology which is adequate for the purpose of sustaining Christian experience, moulding Christian character, energising Christian life, and ensuring the realisation of Christian hopes, is a question that is less easy to

answer—notwithstanding the assistance given throughout a generation of polemics—and upon which more light will be welcome from the deliberate arbitrament of history.

The system of Schleiermacher has been expounded in many treatises, of which the best have been made available for English readers. *Der Christliche Glaube*, however, the most influential book in Dogmatic Theology that has been written since the *Institutio* of Calvin, has never appeared in an English dress.<sup>1</sup> Ritschl's great doctrinal monograph has been translated in part, and the principles and details of his system have been widely discussed by representative theologians of the English-speaking world.<sup>2</sup> In comparison with those expositions our sketch must seem perfunctory; but it may serve as a useful supplement, and possibly as a corrective of the minuter discussions, if we concentrate our attention upon the answers which the two systems supply to the capital questions with which we have been familiarised. We shall therefore inquire what blessings they expect Christianity to confer upon man, and on what terms, and also what foundation they lay, in their doctrine of God and of the person and work of Christ, for upholding and guaranteeing this salvation.

<sup>1</sup> *Der Christliche Glaube*, 1821-2; *Sämmtliche Werke*, 3<sup>te</sup> Auf., Bände iii., iv., 1835-6. The quotations, save when otherwise noted, are from the final edition as in the collected works.

Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology*, E. Tr., 1889. Pfeiderer, *The Development of Theology*, 1890. Of *Der Christliche Glaube* a very full summary has now appeared—Cross, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, a condensed presentation of his chief work, *The Christian Faith*, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 1870-4, 1883, 1888. *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, E. Tr., vol. i. 1872, vol. iii. 1900. Garvie, *The Ritschlian Theology*, 1889. Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith*, 1897. Ritschlianism, 1903. Oman, *Problem of Faith and Freedom*, 1906, ch. v. Edghill, *Faith and Fact. A Study of Ritschlianism*, 1910.

## I

Schleiermacher's conception of the nature or essence of the Christian religion is summarily set forth in a famous definition. 'Christianity,' he says, 'is a monotheistic religion of the teleological class, and it is essentially distinguished from the other religions of the class by the characteristic that in it everything is conceived in relation to the redemption accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth.'<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher thus distinguishes as a special, and indeed as the highest class of religions, those which have the character of an ethical monotheism. In doing so he anticipated the distinction which is now habitually drawn between ethical and non-ethical religions. As a second note of the highest class he emphasises monotheistic belief, and in this he shows a deeper insight than is done in those modern classifications which attach first importance to the distinction between tribal or national, and universal religions. It is, in fact, much more important that a religion should rest on a true idea of God, than that it should aim at the spiritual conquest of the whole human race. Within the small group that have the character of an ethical monotheism, he finds that Christianity is uniquely distinguished by a redemptive note and by a mediatorial note. The blessings of Christianity are of the nature of a redemption, and in their origin and appropriation they are mediated through the person and the work of Christ, who thus occupies in the religion which He founded a central and enduring position which is

<sup>1</sup> *Der Christliche Glaube*, i. p. 67. In the first edition the monotheistic note was not included in the definition.



without parallel even in the other prophetic religions that rest on the work of an individual founder.

✓ The definition is obviously far from perfect. It claims for Christianity as specific the redemptive note, while the idea of redemption may be said to underlie all religion, being central in the great religions of India, as well as prominent in the Old Testament. It also errs by defect. The character of Christianity as a universal religion, though not of the first importance, is at least an essential feature. The twofold nature of the Christian blessings, as individual and racial, should also be expressly recognised. Above all, the evangelical note of Christianity, expressed in its theory of the condition of the appropriation of salvation, is so distinctive, and at the same time so fundamental, that it ought to find a place in any brief descriptive formula that professes to go to the heart of the matter. On the other hand, his system contains materials for a fuller and better balanced definition than that which is ✓ prefaced to the detailed work. The merit and service of the definition appear from the fact that since Schleiermacher scientific theology has hardly ventured to dispute the position which in the period preceding him it freely contested in opposition to the general faith of Christendom—viz. that Christianity has the dignity of a salvation, and that the mediation of this salvation through Christ must be an axiom of Christian thinking.

1. (a) The blessings of the Christian religion, as has been said, are summarily comprehended in redemption. The term is held to be the most suitable description of the content of the Christian salvation, not only because most Christians agree to use it, but also because there is a common element in all Christian thinking upon

the subject. The general idea of redemption is deliverance, by the help of another, out of an estate of bondage; and the Christian redemption consists in deliverance out of the condition in which the religious consciousness is repressed and fettered by the lower sensuous nature, and in which the prevailing mood is one, if not of enmity towards God, at least of godlessness and forgetfulness of God.<sup>1</sup> The nature of redemption, it is stated, consists in this, that the sense of God, which was previously weak and overborne, is freed, intensified, and made the dominant factor in experience. In simpler language, redemption is the condition in which we cease to ignore God, or alternatively, cease to think of Him as a master whom we disobey and a judge whom we fear, and so come to feel that we are at peace with Him, and are joined to Him in the bonds of love and trust.

In the state of redemption, next, it is proper to distinguish two stages—the beginnings, and the subsequent process of spiritual growth. The beginnings may be contemplated from various points of view, human and divine, but they really constitute a single event or act which is best described as regeneration. The sustained process is sanctification, which issues in eternal blessedness.

Regeneration, it is strongly emphasised, is a radical and a necessary change. It is a change which is more than improvement. It goes to the roots of character, and produces what is literally a new creature. The individual who experiences it 'acquires a religious personality which he did not previously possess.'<sup>2</sup> Further, as the new man is radically different from the old, it follows that regeneration is an experience

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 162.

which must be undergone if we are to attain to the chief end and best form of human existence. The regenerate experience, now, has two aspects. Regarded as a relationship of man to God, it is justification, while as a new mode of life it takes the aspect of conversion. The content of conversion has already been indicated in what was said generally of redemption. It is the experience in which the consciousness is flooded by the sense of God, in which the lower self is subjugated by a higher self, and in which a feeling of harmony with God is normally maintained. The parts of conversion are two—repentance and faith.<sup>1</sup>

(b) Up to this point Schleiermacher's method enables him to keep generally to the line of the theological tradition, inasmuch as experience and observation vouch for the reality and the general content of a doctrine of conversion. But the blessing affirmed by Protestantism in its doctrine of justification belongs to a region to which the theologian did not feel that he had a satisfactory passport. It is undoubtedly matter of Christian faith that God forgives sins, and receives the penitent and believing to the full status of children of God. But what do we find to be the significance of this when we try to construe the forgiveness of sins from the point of view of God? In Schleiermacher's opinion Protestant theology went beyond its depth in treating justification as an act of a forensic kind—that is, as an exculpatory judgment passed by God upon the sinner. The idea of a justifying verdict is an interpretation put by faith on a special aspect of what is

<sup>1</sup> 'Conversion, as the beginning of the new life in communion with Christ, attests itself in the individual by repentance, which consists in the combination of contrition and change of heart, and by faith, which consists in the appropriation of the perfection and the blessedness of Christ.'—*Ibid.*, ii. p. 168.



really a single event or experience; and we act honestly in recognising the deeper insight of the Roman Catholic mind, which takes justification to include the act of making the sinner righteous as well as the remission of his sins. The only correction made at this point on the Roman Catholic doctrine is that it is held desirable to confine justification to the experience of renewal which lies at the beginning of the Christian life, and thus to mark it off from the prolonged process of sanctification. The declaratory judgment affirmed in orthodox Protestant theology is resolved by Schleiermacher into a creative act—viz. the touch of divine power which brings about the experience enjoyed by the new creature in Christ Jesus. The one sound sense which the old Protestant doctrine is thought to yield is that every act of conversion, in so far as in it the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins and of divine sonship arises through faith, is a declaration in man of the general divine purpose of granting justification for Christ's sake.<sup>1</sup> In brief, we can affirm that God bestows the gift of a new life through contact with Christ, but to say that He forgives sins and accepts sinners as righteous is merely a repetition of the same fact in different language. In support of this view he urges that conversion and justification are inseparable—which may, of course, be emphatically held by those who regard them as distinct facts, and as facts of different kinds. But the chief reason for identifying justification with regeneration is that the attempt to separate them is held to be due to anthropomorphic modes of thought

<sup>1</sup> 'We are, however, justified in saying that every act of conversion, in so far as in it there arises, along with faith, the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins and of adoption, is at the same time a declaration of the general divine decree to justify for Christ's sake.'—*Ibid.*, ii. p. 200.

which misrepresent the being and the activity of the Infinite. In God thinking and willing coincide, as do also purpose and performance. It is further declared to be unwarrantable to conceive of God as framing particular decrees, and passing particular judgments, in relation to individuals. There is only one divine decree to be taken account of—viz. the decree to justify believers for Christ's sake; and the divine thinking which we construe as His decree is at bottom identical with the divine act of the creation of the human race in its capacity for redemption, and also includes as part of it the sending of Christ.<sup>1</sup> This decree is only to be conceived as particular in respect that individuals successively experience the creative energy which renews them after the likeness of the religious experience of Christ. In other words, we are to think of the believer, not as the object of a divine act which singles him out in love and mercy, but simply as coming within the operation of a general system of spiritual forces and laws which are the vehicle of redemption.

The blessing of regeneration is developed in sanctification. This is defined as 'a vital relationship with Christ, in which the natural powers of the regenerate are placed at His disposal, and which issues in a life akin to the perfection and the blessedness of Christ.'<sup>2</sup>

(c) In the experience of sanctification, moreover, there is given the promise of the survival of death, and of the endless duration of personal existence in the enjoyment of the vision of God. Schleiermacher allows little weight to the philosophical proofs of immortality; and so far from thinking that belief in immortality is a corollary of faith in God, he concedes that it is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 198

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 203.

possible, even in the name of piety, to renounce the hope of an unending existence.<sup>1</sup> The promise of continued existence is a specific boon of Christianity which is bound up with faith in Christ—a faith which involves the assurance that as He lives we must live also.<sup>2</sup> The final state of blessedness consists in the vision of God, but difficulties are felt in conceiving of the heavenly condition—whether it be agreed to think of it as gradually reached, or as immediately attained after death. Again, it is not easy to understand either how it can be a state of perfect bliss without work, or how it can be a state of perfect holiness if it involves difficult tasks and co-operation with others.<sup>3</sup> Finally, some justification is claimed for the optimistic view that a restoration of all human souls will be the goal of the history of redemption.<sup>4</sup>

(d) It is to be added that Schleiermacher did not always conceive the blessings of the Christian religion to be exhausted in the communication to individuals of states of devout feeling. He emphasises, as we have seen, the teleological or ethical character of Christianity, which works for the realisation of the rich complex of graces, virtues and moral activities that are embraced in the idea of the Kingdom of God. He notes that, by universal consent, the piety which does

<sup>1</sup> 'When we consider on the one hand that we can have no stronger assurance of the soul's survival of death than we can have of its pre-existence, and on the other hand that every individual human life, whether regarded from the spiritual or the bodily side, belongs to a definite region in the province of humanity, and to a definite point of development, loses its significance outside these limits, and consequently is only formed for this period as a temporary phenomena, we may regard the collective human spirit as the source of particular souls, as the true living unity, to which eternity and immortality belong, and we may look on particular souls as merely its changing modes of activity.'—*Der Christliche Glaube*, 1<sup>te</sup> Auf., ii. p. 623.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 499 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 505.



not take a hand in the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God on earth is not Christian piety. 'The picture of the Kingdom of God, which is so important in Christianity, and which indeed is all-inclusive, is a general expression of the fact that in the Christian system all pain and all joy are only religious in so far as they are related to activity in the Kingdom of God, and that every religious impulse which starts from a passive condition issues in the consciousness of a transition to activity.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, a man who is only pious, and not also actively good, is not properly religious.

2. If Schleiermacher impairs the Protestant doctrine by resolving justification into regeneration, he claims that he is at least loyal to the cardinal principle of Protestant theology in his affirmation that the sole condition of entrance on the new life is faith in Christ. As we have seen, the religious problem resolves itself for him practically into this: How shall man, who is not naturally pious according to the devoutness of Christ, be quickened into a life akin to His divine life? And a natural answer to the question thus formulated is, that it results from the contact of Christ with the soul which meets Him in the receptive attitude of faith. He therefore rules out as alien to his system the Roman Catholic conception that good works have any place as a presupposition of justification.<sup>2</sup>

It is a convincing observation that we are made Christlike by the influence of Christ coming into

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 55. See also the section on the divine wisdom, ii. p. 519 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 'The position here taken is that a man is justified as soon as faith is engendered in him, while the interest of Roman Catholicism is to establish that he only attains justification through works.'—*Ibid.*, ii. p. 200.

contact with a soul that trusts Him, in the same way in which faith in a human friend is an essential condition of receiving a real impress from his character. With the identification of regeneration and justification, the question of the condition of acceptance with God is also settled; and there is no call to bring in good works as an extra condition. These are rather the fruit of the vital communion with Christ which is first established by faith. Faith in Christ is also the condition of the gradual realisation of Christlike character and blessedness which constitutes sanctification.

3. (a) The blessings which have been enumerated fall next to be considered in respect of their channel and source. We are thus led on to a doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ, and to the doctrine of God which lies in the background, and which ultimately conditions the whole interpretation of the mechanism of redemption. Mention is here made of the Work and Person of Christ in reversal of the usual order, because for Schleiermacher, as well as for later thinkers who have learned from him, the basal certainty is the redeeming work which Christ has accomplished, and the dignity of His person falls to be construed in the light of His benefits. The work of Christ, then, stated in the most concise terms, consists in this, that by Him are engendered the experiences of peace with God, and of deliverances from sin, which are characteristic of the new creature. Christ refashions those who come into contact with Him with the receptivity of the believing heart, and communicates to them an inner experience and a relation toward God which are akin to His own. 'The Redeemer,' we are told, 'assumes believers into participation with His own settled consciousness of God,

and this constitutes His redeeming work.’<sup>1</sup> And again, ‘The Redeemer assumes believers into the communion of His tranquil blessedness, and this constitutes His reconciling work.’<sup>2</sup> The activity which He exerts is of a creative kind, and is due to the inspiring and life-giving influence of spirit upon spirit. The significance of His sufferings and death can be stated with the aid of the traditional terminology of the Atonement,<sup>3</sup> but their essential efficacy lies in the fact that they intensify the influence which He brings to bear upon souls that were previously alienated from God and dominated by the sensuous nature. This creative and sustaining power which flows from Christ is manifested in the Christian society as the work of the Holy Ghost, which is defined as the collective Spirit of the new corporate life that was initiated by Christ.<sup>4</sup> The Church, even more completely than the individual, has as its ideal and destination to become Christlike in its experience, through the creative power of the Spirit proceeding from Christ.<sup>5</sup>

(b) The unique work of Christ as the mediator of the consciousness of redemption, and as the creator of the personality of the new man, is next found to involve a unique dignity of His person. This peculiar dignity consists primarily in the fact that, while a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The high-priestly office of Christ includes His perfect fulfilment of the law, or His active obedience, His atoning death, or His passive obedience, and the representation of believers with the Father.’—*Ibid.*, ii. p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 280. ‘The Holy Spirit is the union of the divine being with human nature in the form of the collective spirit which animates the collective life of believers,’ p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> ‘The Christian Church, as animated by the Holy Spirit, is in its purity and completeness the perfect image of the Redeemer, and every individual person who is regenerated is a complementary element of this society.’—*Ibid.*, p. 306.



historical person and not a creation of the imagination, or an idealised historical figure, He was also the archetypal man—the perfect prototype of a humanity which was new, and which also represented the highest possibility of spiritual life under the human form. The uniqueness of His person consisted in the fact that He possessed a perfect and unbroken sense of union with God, while He also realised to the full the destiny of man in His character of sinless perfection. He was the second Adam—impressive in His resemblance to the first, but still more impressive in the contrasts. He was like him in that He was truly man: He differed from him in that, in circumstances far more unfavourable than the primitive condition of the race—in a situation which involved Him in the life of a corrupt and degenerating society—He remained sinless and perfect in obedience. From this may be inferred the presence in Christ of an inward principle transcending the powers, not only of man as he is, but of man as he was first made.<sup>1</sup> He was like other great men in that, rising above His age and its conditions, He was yet closely knit to His kind and influenced its life; but He differed from them in that, while others have been one-sided in themselves and limited in their influence, He represents absolute perfection, that as the universal man He makes an appeal to the whole human race, and that He is the spiritual head which is capable of animating and sustaining the higher life of all mankind.

This transcendent dignity of Christ is explained by a peculiar presence of God in Christ. It is true that God, in virtue of His omnipresence and His omnipotence, is present in a sense in the whole universe and in all His creatures; that He is more fully present in animate than

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 40 ff.

in inanimate nature, and still more fully when we reach the rational creation; and that He manifests Himself in still increasing fulness where the rational life of humanity rises to the religious stage. In the religious sphere, however, His presence was partial and intermittent until the advent of Christ. Not only in Polytheism, but also at the Old Testament level, God was not fully present in devout men, since He was erroneously or at least inadequately conceived, and the religious impulse was overlaid and repressed by the demands and the prepotency of the sensuous nature. He was in Christ properly and fully in respect that in Him the higher religious consciousness was absolutely pure and dominant. 'In Him alone,' it is said, 'of the rational creation, was the being of God properly present, inasmuch as His religious consciousness was constant and exclusively determined every aspect of His self-consciousness, and this complete indwelling of God constituted His peculiar being and His innermost self.'<sup>1</sup> We can speak of a unique presence of God in Christ in respect that 'Christ alone truly mediates all being of God in the world, and all revelation of God through the world, in so far as He bears in Himself the whole creation in which a new vigour of the religious consciousness has been sustained and developed.'<sup>2</sup> He was, in short, the perfectly religious man, who is the fountain of true religion, and through living faith in whom we also may become perfectly religious.

(c) The extraordinary in the person of Christ, it is further held, points to extraordinary circumstances of origin.<sup>3</sup> The conditions under which we enter the world, predetermined as we are to estrangement from God and the dominion of sin, must in His case have been

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 44 ff.

inoperative. In our case life is started with an endowment resulting from the conjunction of two sets of forces—one made up of heredity and social environment, the other an output of the divine power that works with elemental and originating energy in the workshop of human nature; and though the influence of those factors varies widely in different individuals, the resultant difference is only one of degree. But in Jesus the influence of heredity, so far as making for sinful tendencies, entirely disappeared; and the person was constituted by a creative act which lifted up human nature in Him to the plane of ideal perfection. By one and the same act He was emancipated from the sinister influences of natural heredity, and was made ready and meet for the dwelling of God in Him in fulness. It is not, indeed, maintained that it is a necessary part of this conception that Jesus should have been conceived in the womb of the Virgin apart from the natural process of generation.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the Virgin-birth would in any case require to be supplemented by the assumption of a creative act which preserved Jesus from the transmission of a taint of sin through His Mother; and the same doctrinal postulate would sufficiently safeguard His sinlessness even if He were supposed to have been begotten in the ordinary course of nature. The miracle of the Virgin-birth, that is, is on his view held to be superfluous, and this is confirmed by the fact that there is no consentient apostolic tradition which convincingly vouches for it.

(*d*) The person of Christ, then, according to Schleiermacher, was due to a creative act of God carried out in pursuit of the same decree which embraced the creation of man, and which embraces the regeneration

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 64 ff.



of those who are successively gathered into the Kingdom of God. His conception breaks with Rationalism in affirming the uniqueness of Christ, and also (in a sense) His supernatural origin; but it does not rise above the Sabellian conception that Christ was a manifestation in time of the God who as eternal exists above the plane of the triune distinction. What then is the idea of God which conditions Schleiermacher's doctrine of the person and work of Christ? The fundamental conception is that God is the reality upon which we are conscious of being absolutely independent. This feeling is awakened, not in relation to the world—which, though it may be infinite, is a partitioned and finitely disposed infinite—but only in relation to the simple and unconditioned infinite. 'To feel ourselves absolutely dependent,' we read, 'and to feel ourselves absolutely dependent upon God is one and the same thing.'<sup>1</sup> From this it appears that the idea of God is satisfied by the mere negative condition that it is not identical with the idea of the world, while its positive content may be left indeterminate. It is unnecessary, in particular, Schleiermacher held, to determine the idea of God in the sense of Theism. 'It is left open to every one,' he says, 'without prejudice to his claim to be of the Christian faith, to adopt any form of speculation regarding the being of God he may deem fit, provided always that his view supplies an object to which the feeling of absolute dependence can be related.'<sup>2</sup> His own construction of God emphasised the abstract simplicity of the divine being to a degree which reduces the divine being to the unknown and unknowable ground of the creative and redemptive process which meets us in the world. The attributes

<sup>1</sup> *Der Christliche Glaube*, 1<sup>te</sup> Auf., i. p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 250.

are resolved into differences in the way in which we apprehend and interpret the working of a being who is Himself an undivided unity, and in whom knowing and willing coincide.<sup>1</sup> This type of theology is usually described as pantheistic, but it might even be described as a qualified Agnosticism—qualified by the retention of the category of causality as applicable to the relation of God and the world, and by a hope that it is competent to affirm what God does, although we may not trust ourselves to infer, from what He does, anything as to what He is in Himself.

## II

It has already been observed that the system of Schleiermacher has the merit of reasserting the persistent conviction of Christendom that in the Christian religion blessings are bestowed upon mankind which are supremely worth having, and which are otherwise unattainable. The ethical quality of the benefits is also realised. The reiteration with which he insists that the essence of religion is devout feeling creates a provisional impression that all which he attributed to Christianity was the enjoyment of a refined spiritual luxury, and that even though this æsthetic indulgence were dispensed with, it might not entail any very serious detriment to character, to man's position in the world, and to the religious outlook. But this is a misunderstanding. The religious feeling which is fastened on as the distinctive religious experience is a state of consciousness in which the all-important

<sup>1</sup> *Der Christliche Glaube*, ii. p. 258. 'All attributes which we ascribe to God have the function, not of denoting something particular in God, but only of denoting something particular in the mode in which the feeling of absolute dependence is related to Him.'

difference has been made for character that the supremacy of the lower nature, with its sensuous and sin-bound propensities, has been broken, and that the whole of the inner habitudes of thought and volition are dominated by a trustful dependence on God, and by a reference to His will. Further, not only the new birth, but the growth of the devout and earnest type of character to which it gives rise, is regarded as conditioned by the maintenance of a vital communion with the risen Christ. As to the life to come, he so magnifies the grace and promise of the Christian religion as to make it appear more than doubtful if man can expect immortality apart from Christ and also incredible that those can perish who live in Christ.

1. The one serious deprivation which his system entails in the matter of religious blessings is involved in his resolution of justification into regeneration. The believer is left with the friendship of Christ, but God has retreated to an infinite distance as the mere author of the economy which has yielded Christ, and has liberated the quickening influences that bring a new creature into existence. From the religious point of view the all-important matter is that the individual stands in a relationship to God in which he is the immediate object of the divine love, and of a divine judgment of acceptance which involves forgiveness and deliverance from all evil; and it is impossible to acquiesce, without irreparable loss, in the view that this is a mere aspect or interpretation of what happens when the soul is quickened by a new experience on a similar plane to that on which Christ lived.

2. Schleiermacher's inadequate conception of the central blessing of Christianity is bound up with a defective conception of the conditions of salvation. If the



essential problem be the creation of a new personality with the Christlike experience, it is natural to conceive of the redemptive work of Christ as consisting merely in the transmission of His spirit to the souls which lay themselves open to His influence in the receptive attitude of faith. In taking this position Schleiermacher strongly, and, from his point of view, convincingly, asserts the Protestant tenet that faith in Christ is the subjective condition of justification; but, for the rest, he can hardly be said to meet the religious need which demands a work of Christ for us as well as a work of Christ within us. If we insist that, in addition to the problem of regeneration, there is a further question as to the conditions of acceptance with God, his view takes us back in principle to the Roman Catholic position that the basis of our religious assurance is what Christ has made of us through the operations of His grace. But a religious theory which, by whatever path, brings us back to the imperfect self as the ground of our confidence violates what may well be felt to be an axiom of the Christian religion. Our deepest spiritual need is to look away even from what has been divinely and graciously wrought in ourselves to a ground of confidence which is wholly of God, and perfectly worthy of God; and it is a mark of theological decadence to disturb religious assurance by transferring the gaze to the humiliated and imprisoned Christ that is discernible in the experiences even of the most Christlike of those who have entered on the new life.

3. It is a still more serious question whether the theology of Schleiermacher is adequate to support and to make effective the great salvation which (notwithstanding some deductions) he credits to the Christian

religion. The central idea is often expressed in terms which are indistinguishable from those in which a popular type of British evangelicalism makes everything to depend on personal intercourse with the risen and glorified Christ. He seems to resolve the scheme of salvation, as is increasingly common in a current form of the Gospel, into a friendship with Christ which is the source of all healing, energising and consoling influences. But apart from the question as to whether it is proper to lay stress on mystical union with Christ as the typical form of Christian experience, we may well ask if the underlying theology of Schleiermacher is such as to warrant the faith in Christ which he inculcated, and the position which he accorded to Him in the universe. Can the Christ of evangelical faith survive without a definitely theistic background? If Christ be the eternal Son of God who became incarnate, who has been exalted after His humiliation to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and who has carried His human nature, and the sympathy learned in His human experience, into the being of God, it may well be believed that He sustains a saving relation to believing souls, and that the mystical union—though not necessarily realised in the experience of all disciples—is at least a conscious privilege of the more finely moulded and saintly souls. But is such a Christ possible if God be only the unknown ground of the world and of human experiences, and only conceived of as a personal being because human beings must construe Him with their finite thoughts? From Schleiermacher's standpoint in religious philosophy personal immortality is more than improbable, and it is still more improbable that Jesus Christ continues to exist in personal being as the centre of spiritual influences that are radiated into

believing hearts all over the world and from century to century. At the most He may stand as a symbol of the infinite being—as useful as all other symbols, but also as inadequate. It is, in fact, difficult to regard the Christ whom he sought to save from the shipwreck of Rationalism as other than a figure which ministers to the needs of imagination and heart, but which is quite inadequately guaranteed as reality except to a faith that cleaves to a personal God who is also the Father in heaven. It is the unforgettable service of Schleiermacher that he asserted the validity of Christian experience and the rights of Christian faith, and that he exalted the mediatorship of Christ; but the tendency of his scheme of thought was to give us a Christ who ousts the infinite being, if not from religious thinking, at least from the religious affections, and who if He be no more than a symbol of an unknown power on which all things depend, is also not merely an imperfect symbol but a questionable idol.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RITSCHLIAN REVISION

THE deep impression made by the Ritschlian theology may be explained by the fact that it sought to satisfy two characteristic demands of the modern Christian mind. It endeavoured to do justice to the doctrines which have been realised to be the source of the power of historical Christianity; and it endeavoured to give peace to the modern intellectual conscience by abandoning critical and doctrinal positions which had come to seem untenable. There may also be force in the contention of Frank that it was congenial to an age which has a diminished sense, if not of the power, at least of the heinousness and the guilt of sin.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it cannot be said that it has owed its influence to the novelty of its doctrinal constructions. The originality consists mainly in the fact that Ritschl consistently operated with his own method, and that it yielded a synthesis of truths, of heresies, and also of confessions of ignorance, that had not previously been brought together in the same combination and proportion.

Ritschl counts it a merit of Schleiermacher that he propounded a definition of Christianity—derived from the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, and confirmed by comparative theology, which should govern the treatment of particular doctrines of the Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte der neueren Theologie insbesondere der systematischen*, 1894, ch. v.

system.<sup>1</sup> His main criticism of Schleiermacher's definition is that, while perceiving that the central blessings of Christianity are redemption through Christ and the Kingdom of God, he lost sight in the course of his work of the importance of the latter conception, and in particular that he failed to set redemption in its due place as the means by which God realises His grand end of the Kingdom. He also pointed out, and with justice, that it is not a peculiar feature of Christianity which is affirmed in describing it as a redemptive religion—that this note is shared with it by the prophetic religion of the Old Testament, and that the specific difference of Christianity rather lies in its thoroughgoing spiritual conception of the content and method of redemption, and also in the realisation of the destination of the blessings to the whole human race. The definition in which Ritschl gives effect to his amendments runs as follows:—  
'Christianity is the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based on the life of its author as Redeemer and as Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral organisation of mankind, and grounds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God, as well as on the Kingdom of God.'<sup>2</sup>

In point of form this definition leaves something to be desired. It has the merit of emphasising the practical bent of religion, and after prefacing weighty notes of Christianity it gives due prominence to a statement of its blessings and of the basis on which they rest. But the statement is ill arranged, redundant and defective. The list of the fundamental

<sup>1</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. E. Tr., p. 8 ff.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

characteristics should include the note of universality, which it shares with Buddhism and Mohammedanism. The gift of eternal life may be implied in 'blessedness,' but its explicit affirmation in the form of immortality is required in view of its intrinsic importance, and also in view of the marked tendency of philosophical theology to treat personal immortality as matter of indifference. It may also be thought that the evangelical note expressed in the doctrine of Justification by Faith enters no less vitally into the Christian religion than the ethical doctrine that Christian conduct is rooted in love.<sup>1</sup>

In general it may be said that the Ritschlian definition gives provisional support to our estimate that its promise of blessings is ampler than the divine provision on which reliance is placed for making the blessings effective. It reproduces Schleiermacher's observation that the mediatorship of Christ is vital to the Christian religion, but it proceeds to fasten attention on the predicate of 'founder of the Kingdom of God,' which paves the way for a weakened doctrine of the person and work of Christ. It may also be suggested that the definition of a religion which is confessedly the crowning and final revelation of God should convey something more of the great disclosure that has been made concerning the nature of the divine being than is set forth in the observation that it is a monotheistic religion. The most valuable feature of the definition is that it concentrates attention on the fact that the Christian religion is the vehicle for the conveyance to mankind, in dependence upon God as revealed in Christ, of large comprehensive and unique blessings, and that these make not only for an

<sup>1</sup> The definition of Professor Adams Brown is of the Ritschlian type, but does not show much improvement in arrangement and definiteness. — *The Essence of Christianity*, 1902.



individual, but also for a racial salvation. 'Christianity,' he says, 'is not like a circle described from a centre, but an ellipse which is determined by two foci.'<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the blessings of redemption and the Kingdom of God. In these two he has usefully comprehended the gifts which have come to the world from God through Jesus Christ. The main question that arises at this stage is whether redemption is to be conceived as the means towards the end of the realisation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> This may mean that redemption is merely a means to the end of the coming of a Kingdom of love upon earth; but this would conflict with one of the deepest and best assured of religious convictions—viz. that there is a religious relationship, a possessing and being possessed by God, which is a sovereign good of the finite spirit, and which does not require to offer a vindication of itself by pointing to its utility for an ulterior purpose. It may, however, only mean that the religious relationship, when real, issues in labour within and for that Kingdom which embraces all righteousness and holiness and loving service. But in this form the doctrine of the teleological bearing of redemption is no recent discovery. It has been the doctrine of innumerable plain sermons from the apostolic age downward, that, having tasted of the Grace of God, it behoves men to bring forth the fruits of the sanctified and dedicated life. Its realisation by the Church has led to the cultivation on the basis of Dogmatics of a discipline of Christian Ethics. If Ritschl, in his indictment of all earlier theology,<sup>3</sup> means that it had no vision of a

<sup>1</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. E. Tr., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 'The reconciliation of sinners by God is conceivable as the means used for the establishment of the Kingdom of God by God's love.'  
—*Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Kingdom of God to be realised through grace and obedience in the midst of the life of the world, it is strange that, beyond paying a slight compliment to Zwingli, he should have overlooked this aspect of the spirit and tradition of Calvinistic theology. The old Lutheranism may have been infected by a one-sided spirituality and a timid individualism; but the churches which learned from Calvin, including the Scottish Church, had a firm grasp of the truth that Christ is not merely the Redeemer of guilty men, but that He also came to enable families and schools, cities and nations, to subject every department of their activity to the laws of God, and even to annex them as spheres of the Kingdom of God.

## I

In his conception and exposition of the Christian blessings Ritschl advances upon the position of Schleiermacher by a fuller response to the demands of the religious instinct for a great and comprehensive salvation. This he does mainly by magnifying the service which the Christian religion renders to the race in the foundation of the Kingdom of God, in part also by claiming more religious substance and value for the religious boon of Justification.

1. The Kingdom of God is regarded as the crowning and, in a manner, the all-inclusive blessing of the Christian religion. 'The conception of God,' he says, 'which is given in the revelation received through Christ is that of a loving will which assures to believers spiritual dominion over the world and perfect moral fellowship in the Kingdom of God as the *summum bonum*.'<sup>1</sup> The Kingdom is the chief good for mankind,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

and the chief good for the individual may be defined as membership in the Kingdom. 'Christianity attaches blessedness for man to participation in the Kingdom of God and lordship over the world.'<sup>1</sup> Its nature is indicated generally in the clauses of the above-quoted definition, which point to the realisation of the final end of Christianity in the moral organisation of mankind, and in conduct which has its impulse from the motive of love.

What then is this *summum bonum* of Christianity—the Kingdom of God? A kingdom may stand for one or more or all of these things—the rule which is exercised by a sovereign, the territory over which he holds sway, the people whom he governs, the privileges enjoyed by his subjects, the activities which are carried on in the various departments of the life of the realm. As employed by Ritschl, the name frequently refers to the society or fellowship of persons embraced in the Kingdom. Thus it is said that the Christian idea of the Kingdom of God 'denotes the association of mankind—an association both extensively and intensively the most comprehensive possible, through the reciprocal moral action of its members.'<sup>2</sup> In other passages the emphasis is shifted to the privileges which are enjoyed, and the obligations which are imposed, in the life of the subjects of the Kingdom. These aspects are recognised in the distinction which is drawn between the Kingdom of God as a gift from God and as a task imposed by God. The Kingdom is said to be a religious conception—in that it represents a gift of God or 'an operation of God directed towards man'; and it is also said to be an ethical conception, inasmuch as it

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284. 'The association of man for reciprocal and common action from the motive of love,' p. 290. 'A Kingdom in which all are knit together in union with every one who can show the marks of a neighbour,' p. 334.



is only through the discharge by men of the divinely imposed task—through the rendering of obedience on their part—that ‘God’s sovereignty possesses continuous existence.’ These two meanings, it is added, are interdependent.<sup>1</sup> This account of the Kingdom has the appearance of a description of the Christian Church, but the Kingdom is really conceived as a much wider and also as a much more elusive reality. To some extent Kingdom and Church merely represent two different aspects and endeavours of the same community. ‘Those who believe in Christ,’ it is said, ‘constitute a Church in so far as they express in prayer their faith in God the Father, or present themselves to God as men who through Christ are well-pleasing to Him. The same believers in Christ constitute the Kingdom of God in so far as, ignoring distinctions of sex, rank or nationality, they act reciprocally from love, and thus bring into existence that fellowship of moral disposition and moral blessings which extends through all possible gradations to the limits of the human race.’<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the Kingdom would appear to consist of that portion of the human race which has been raised to the Christian plane of character and service, while if we look away from persons to things, it consists of the privileges, the virtues, and the graces, and also the ethical obligations, of the Christian life. It is the sphere in which life has been thoroughly moralised—in which brotherly love has become the ruling principle

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. So also, ‘The Kingdom of God is the highest good assured by God to the community through His revelation in Christ, but it is to be regarded as the highest good only in so far as it is at the same time recognised as the moral ideal for the realisation of which the members of the community bind themselves one to another by a definite rule of reciprocal action.’—*Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion*.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. E. Tr., p. 285.

of action, and manifests itself in unselfish service of man, in the forms of brotherly kindness, philanthropy, and above all of faithfulness and diligence in one's appointed calling. It is implied, however, in what was already said of the religious character of the idea of the Kingdom that it is not a mere synonym for a moralised society. It is also a sphere of religious privilege. The members are thoroughly religious in spirit as well as ethical in principle. They enjoy the fundamental religious boon of security and freedom over against the world as the result of their relation to God, who is the Master of the world. They enjoy the privilege of access to God, they lay hold of Him in faith, they approach Him in prayer. As united to God they gain the victory over the world—not indeed in the sense that they find its laws set aside by God because of their faith and prayers, but in the sense that all the changes, chances and calamities of time are powerless to harm them, and are transmuted into a discipline that works consistently for the good of the children of God. The forms in which this victory over the world comes to expression are a childlike trust in Providence, and a humility evidenced in childlike submission to the will of God amid the untoward and cruel happenings of life. Membership in the Kingdom also carries with it the privilege of entertaining the Christian hope of eternal life. Ritschl has been accused of cautiously limiting his outlook to the present life, and in his analysis of eternal life he undoubtedly furnishes some ground for the charge by refusing to discuss the content of eternal life in a future state, and confining himself to its manifestations in this life in the forms of joy, blessedness and the feeling of exaltation.<sup>1</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

there can be no doubt whatever that his general view of the function of religion as calling upon God for the protection of our highest interests justifies faith in continued personal existence, and that he himself confidently drew this inference. 'Man apprehends himself,' he says, 'as a being who stands near to the supramundane God, and claims to live in spite of the experience of death. Christianity has only unfolded that view of the world in which this aspiration finds its confirmation, and the question about eternal life is answered.'<sup>1</sup>

2. We have next to advert to two spiritual blessings which, while enjoyed by members of the Kingdom, may also be regarded as the presupposition of membership. These are reconciliation and justification which, though separable in thought, yet coincide in actual experience.<sup>2</sup> Reconciliation is a change of attitude on the part of the sinner toward God, and comes about when he takes up towards God an attitude of childlike trust and obedience. Justification is an act of God in which the sinner is accepted as righteous and his sins are forgiven. The force of the doctrine of forgiveness of sins is that they no longer act as a bar to communion with God, and to the enjoyment of the privileges of His Kingdom. 'Justification, or the forgiveness of sins, as the operation of God upon men which is fundamental in Christianity, is the acceptance of sinners into that fellowship with God in which their salvation is to be realised and carried out unto eternal life.'<sup>3</sup> He agrees with Schleiermacher that a single divine act

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 610. 'Personal assurance of the indestructibility of spiritual existence always attaches itself to experiences of the religious-ethical character,' p. 669.

<sup>2</sup> 'Though reconciliation is properly conceived as justification made operative so that they may not be identified in thought, it is difficult to separate them in time.'

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.



underlies the experience of regeneration, but insists that the aspect which it wears of a declaratory judgment upon the sinner belongs as truly to the realm of reality as the new life which is brought into existence by the creative exercise of divine power. He thus adheres in principle to the interpretation of justification as a forensic act, in so far as a paternal judgment can be described in the language of the court of law. He also strongly affirms that the judgment is synthetic—that is, it adds a predicate not previously found in the sinner, and accepts him for something other than he actually is.<sup>1</sup> He thus reaffirms the fundamental position of the evangelical version of Christianity that the divine judgment of justification is not based on the worthiness of the sinner, but is an act of magnanimity to which faith is related as the mere condition of its being appropriated and made effective in the experiences and activities of a new life.

Ritschl follows Schleiermacher in conceiving of the divine purpose in redemption as relating primarily to an economy and to an aggregate of redeemed persons, and as bearing upon individuals only in so far as they come within the range of the system, and claim its benefit.<sup>2</sup> This idea is expressed in the form that the object of Justification is the Christian society, and that it is passed on to the individual as the result of his taking place in the Christian fellowship and sharing in its life.<sup>3</sup> The interest of this proposition lies in the fact that it may be a disguised statement, either of the Arminian doctrine that the elective decree of God is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Justification or reconciliation is related in the first instance to the whole of the religious community founded by Christ, and to individuals only as they attach themselves by faith in the Gospel thereto.—*Ibid.*, p. 130.

conditional, or of the Catholic tenet that there is no salvation outside of the visible Church. Undoubtedly the tenet expresses Ritschl's antipathy to absolute predestination, and it also has the practical effect of magnifying the function of the Church as a storehouse or medium of the means of grace. But in refusing to conceive the individual as the immediate object of justification, Ritschl was really misled by undue deference to Schleiermacher, to whom it was dictated by his philosophical idea of God, and the latter thinker did not sufficiently reconsider it in the light of his own more Christian conception of God.

3. It does not fall within our purpose to discuss the many controversial points which are raised in the above scheme of thought. Our present interest centres in the general question as to whether the Ritschlian theology conceives the Christian blessings on such a scale, and esteems them of such a quality, that the Christian religion retains the character of a great salvation, and promises benefits adequate to the spiritual needs and capacities of man. To this question the answer must be in the affirmative. It may be objected with force that Ritschl did less than justice to the mystical side of religion, and that he failed to realise that a good which is good in itself, and not merely useful as a means to an end, is enjoyed by the soul which enters into union with the God of justification and reconciliation. But if Christianity accomplishes all that he affirms—blessing the individual with access to God in the forgiveness of sins, a Christlike spirit of filial trust and obedience, the subjection of the whole life to the law of love, the title to hold the Christian hope, while it also establishes and fosters in the world a Kingdom of God which is a preserving salt to society, the life of its higher life, and the nursery of those of its great men whose great-

ness is rooted in goodness, the suggestion is inadmissible that Ritschl has very seriously abridged or mutilated the blessings which are promised in the Christian Gospel.

## II

Our religious interest accordingly shifts to the second capital question—viz. whether he operates with a saving machinery which is sufficient to redeem these rich promises, and to translate them into fact in the experience of individuals and of the race. His starting-point is that redemption is of Christ. The blessings comprehended in redemption and the Kingdom of God are the fruits of the work of Christ. Like Schleiermacher, he finds it of the very genius of Christianity that Christ occupies a central and permanent position as the mediator of benefits of the Christian salvation. For this there is a twofold reason—that He was the bearer of the perfect and final revelation of God, and especially that to Him the Christian community is indebted both for its origin, and for its continued vitality, purity and strength. ‘The community which is called on to form itself by union into the Kingdom of God, and whose activity consists in carrying out this assigned task, depends entirely for its origin on the fact that the Son of God is its Lord to whom it renders obedience. The community as the object to which God’s love extends cannot even be conceived apart from the presupposition that it is governed continually by its founder as its Lord, and that its members go through the experience of being transformed into that peculiar character of which their Lord is the original, and which through Him is communicated to them.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. E. Tr., p. 281.



The conception is substantially Schleiermacher's doctrine of Christ as the second Adam—the chief difference being that Schleiermacher regarded Christ as archetypal mainly in respect that He exemplified and transmitted the spirit of constant filial piety, while Ritschl lays more stress upon His manifestation of filial obedience and love to man. This may be more simply expressed by saying that salvation or membership in the Kingdom consists in possessing a Christlike piety and goodness—that there are men, women, and children in the world who are Christlike in different degrees, and that in the last resort they owe their Christlikeness to Christ.

1. What next, we have to ask, did Christ do to found, and what does He do to sustain, this community? The answer to the first question is that He lived His life in perfect trust and obedience, and that He exhibited the same qualities when fidelity to His vocation required Him to endure suffering and death. On Ritschl's view the death of Christ could have no significance as a propitiation for sin—whereby it was made possible for God to receive sinners to mercy, for the only difficulty to be reckoned with was on the side of man with His sense of guilt and His distrust or fear of God. The value of the death of Christ for us lay in the fact that it is a power which continues to awaken the steadfast faith in God's love, the spirit of obedience unto death, and the sense of victory over the world, which are among the chiefest privileges or responsibilities of the members of the Kingdom. The nomenclature of priesthood and sacrifice are retained, but substantially the meaning is that He was the Saviour because of the spirit of sacrifice which informed His life, and which came to its clearest and most

compendious expression in the world-subduing faith, and in the perfect obedience, of His passion. On the other hand Ritschl holds that the work of Christ is in an objective way the ground of forgiveness and acceptance. In a real sense God pardons for Christ's sake, since Christ lived and died to found the Kingdom, and God forgives in the interests of the Kingdom. How then does Christ reproduce men after His likeness so that they become citizens of the Kingdom? Ritschl does not make use, as Schleiermacher does, of the idea of a mystic relationship of Christ in which an evangelical piety may recognise a passable description of the experience of quickening power and comfort which is enjoyed in the friendship of Christ. To Ritschl this conception was more than uncongenial: 'sentimental intercourse with the risen Christ' was esteemed a pathological aspect of Pietism, which was improperly commended as normal, and which was responsible for much of the prejudice felt against Christianity by the more virile types of modern Christian character. Has Ritschl then no dynamic available save the commonplace explanation of the older rationalism that Jesus was the perfect exemplar of piety and virtue, and that He moulds us in piety and virtue, according to our degrees, by the influence emanating from His teaching, and above all by the constraining force of His example? This seems to be all that is recognised in such a passage as the following:—'What in the historically complete figure of Christ we recognise to be the real worth of His existence, gains for ourselves the worth of an abiding rule; since we at the same time discover that only *through the impulse and direction* we receive from Him is it possible for us to enter into His relation to

God and to the world.’<sup>1</sup> It was, however, clearly seen by Ritschl that a large mass of the Christian character, inspiration and endeavour which makes up the Kingdom of God is not directly traceable to the teaching and example of Christ. It has been transmitted through the life, institutions and activities of the Christian society. The creative and sustaining work of Christ is largely accomplished through the collective spirit and life which passed from Him into the society which He founded. In this collective life and spirit we are in touch with the grace and power of the glorified Lord, or with the operations of the Holy Spirit. They are the realities which appear in these religious phenomena.

2. Like Schleiermacher, Ritschl starts with the work of Christ as Redeemer, and in the light of His benefactions he construes the dignity of His person. In view of the service He renders, the benefits He bestows, and the saving work which He accomplishes, we rightly attribute to Him the predicate of Godhead. He who does the work of God in founding the Kingdom of God, in giving knowledge of and access to God, and in building up souls in the likeness of God, holds relations to us which can only be properly described in terms of God. The affirmation of the divinity of Christ has the character of a judgment of value, but this has the significance that it is affirmed on the ground of the experienced power of Christ. It does not mean that it is merely a useful symbol, and one which is not seriously meant to cover reality. The divinity of Christ means that in Christ God came and comes into living contact with mankind, so that in dealing with Him we have to do with God. For Schleiermacher the divinity

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.



of Christ practically meant that Jesus Christ was the perfect exemplar of piety, who was called divine because of His close and constant sense of fellowship and harmony with God. For Ritschl the essential meaning of the divinity of Christ is that He was a man in whom God was revealed, in the fullest measure that was possible in a human being subject to the forms of human experience. In Christ, in brief, God was so manifested that God is understood, not only from His words, but in His person. What, now, are the divine qualities which shine forth in Jesus Christ? He revealed God in His grace and truth, or more summarily in His love, so that we can trust God for such a love as was seen in Christ—far-reaching, holy, sympathetic, beneficent, self-sacrificing. He also revealed the power of God. Under this head we are not reminded of the acts of divine power which are ascribed to Christ in the Gospel record: the theme is worked out in more circuitous fashion by showing that Christ possessed mastery over the world in the sense that it was powerless to destroy or even to injure Him, and that He emerged from the worst trials which it could bring, and from the fiercest assaults which it could deliver, as Lord and Saviour. Lastly, the godlikeness of Christ which is His divinity was seen in the fact that the purpose of His life was identical with the purpose pursued by God towards the human race. The goal of human history, as decreed by God, is the realisation of His Kingdom on earth; and the founding of this Kingdom Jesus accepted as His vocation, to this vocation His whole work was subordinated, and in fidelity to it He endured the death of the Cross.

The theological method of Ritschl debars him from including in the dogmatic system articles which have

no point of contact in the believing experience of the members of the Christian society. On this account he can find no place for the Catholic doctrines of the mode of Christ's incarnation and His pre-existence. The Virgin-birth is ignored as necessarily wanting in experimental corroboration as well as in adequate historical proof; and it is also pronounced superfluous in view of other and more conclusive evidence that grace and truth were in Jesus Christ. For the same reason he refrains from the affirmation of the pre-existence of Christ, which evidently cannot claim the same support of immediate personal experience to which appeal is made when testimony is borne to the grace and power of the glorified Christ. The pre-existence of Christ he only affirms in the sense that He was eternally known and embraced in the divine purpose; and that, from the divine point of view, in which there is no separation between decree and act, this involves that for God Christ is the eternal Son.<sup>1</sup> In the same sense and terms it is clearly possible to affirm pre-existence of ourselves.

3. The Ritschlian conception of God, as compared with that of Schleiermacher, marks an unmistakable return to the standpoint of Christian Theism. There are, indeed, traces of Schleiermacher's thinking in detached positions, but the whole theological thinking is governed—so far as the epistemological theory does not interfere—by loyalty to the idea of God which underlies the Christian system. The article of the personality of God is vigorously defended, with some debt to Lotze,

<sup>1</sup> 'If we discount, in the case of God, the interval between purpose and accomplishment, then we get the formula that Christ exists for God eternally as that which He appears to us under the limitations of time. But only for us since for us, as pre-existent, Christ is hidden.'—*Ibid.*, p. 471.

against the Pantheistic school,<sup>1</sup> and with equal emphasis he affirms the transcendence of God. God's distinction from and elevation above the world are maintained as a vital interest of religion.

(a) The fundamental attribute is conceived as love, with which omnipotence is associated as the condition of His loving will being able to accomplish its purpose to give man the victory over the world. The divine attribute of justice, in Ritschl's view, has been misconceived in the theological tradition: it has no interest in punishing sin out of regard for the rights of God or the demands of violated law, and it is properly interpreted as merely a steadfast purpose of God to establish His Kingdom of righteousness and love. Though stated in his own peculiar way the idea seems to be a reproduction of the view of Origen, that the divine justice is divine love in the custody, and under the administration, of divine wisdom.

(b) Combining the idea of God with the foregoing doctrine of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, Ritschl is able to propound a Trinitarian doctrine of the Dynamistic type. His theory of knowing, and also the supposed duty of theology to keep strictly to what is experimentally verifiable, preclude the attempt to penetrate to distinctions and relations in the inner life of the Godhead, and to exhibit the knowledge thus gained in the Catholic dogma of an ontological Trinity. The law that a thing is given in its appearances holds of God as well as of finite beings. But in justice to Ritschl it has to be added that for him phenomenon belongs to the world of reality, that in the appearance the thing actually appears; and that therefore it was very God who was manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226 ff.



who is with us still as the Holy Spirit which is the spring of the spiritual and moral life of the Kingdom of God.

### III

The scheme thus outlined of the means of salvation, as distinguished from the content of salvation, must be held to be inadequate in the light of our previous discussions. For it is not easy to name any specifically Ritschlian doctrine of capital importance which has not in some former situation sought to establish itself in theology in a slightly different form, and which did not evoke misgiving or solemn protest as impairing the efficacy or diminishing the security of the Christian salvation. The Ritschlian doctrine of the Atonement, indeed, is no mere reproduction of the theory of moral influence, since it responds to the religious need of perceiving an objective ground of reconciliation, by the illuminating idea that God forgives sinners for the sake of the Kingdom. But much weight must be given to the fact that this seems an inadequate ground of acceptance to those who have undergone the experience of repentance in its classic form, realised the unspeakable heinousness of sin, and known the wrath of God to be one of the most assured of facts of the spiritual world. The doctrine of the person of Christ, and of the Trinity, has its ancient counterpart in the construction of Paul of Samosata; and there were weighty religious reasons, as we have seen, which led the ancient Church to hold it vital to affirm the personal pre-existence of Christ, and to believe that the threefold manifestation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit requires to be supported by the doctrine of an essential Trinity. In particular the divinity of Christ, on Ritschl's view,

does not seem to mean more than that He revealed God by being a godlike man; and a godlike man is considerably lower in the scale of being than the Arian Son who, though conceived to be the godlike instrument of creation and providence, was yet not great enough to satisfy the demands of Christian faith. Further, the Ritschlian scheme is weakened by the rationalistic tendency to substitute for the divine energies embraced in the traditional scheme the power of ideas and of social influences. The strength of the Catholic position lies in the fact that it gives access by faith to a living person who is very God, and from whom proceeds the Holy Spirit, also a living person, the Lord and Giver of life. And what Ritschl substitutes for this, according to the best judgment of the present writer, is a Christ who enables us to form a just idea of God, and who has founded a world-wide and enduring Christian society, the influences of which go to mould and to energise Christian character. While he does justice to the deepest conviction of the Church in emphasising the mediatorship of Christ, it may fairly be affirmed that he has deprived Him of the special qualities—viz. an essential Godhead and a vitalising power, which made His mediatorship to be valued by the Christian society as the indispensable means of realising what was greatest in the great salvation.

On the other hand it is to be observed that the Ritschlian theology is a positive theology which sets forth a body of extremely important truths. It is right in what it affirms, and its affirmations are truths which are of the highest value for thought, for character and for life. To believe in a personal God whose essence is love, to think of the infinite and eternal God in terms of Jesus Christ, to be assured that He forgives the sins

of those who repent and believe, to accept as the end of history the establishment of the Kingdom of God, to hear His call to serve Him in His Kingdom by fidelity in one's calling, and by Christlike love of man, to trust the love of the Father amid all the ills and disappointments of life, and so to endure to the end—all this makes up an intellectual and religious equipment which is no mean provision for fighting the spiritual battles of the modern world. It may not sufficiently draw upon the supernatural sources of life and power for producing and sustaining the most saintly type of experience, but regarded even as a scheme of religious and ethical ideas it is fitted to do a great work in that process of leavening which is no unimportant part of the business of the Gospel.

As a fact it would seem that the Ritschlian theology is a selection and instalment of Christian truths which are fitted to render apologetic service of great value in relation to our particular age. For it is a curious circumstance that, while Ritschl insists that faith is needed to receive the truths of the Gospel, the doctrines which he puts forward are for the most part such as have little appearance of foolishness even to the half-spiritual man. The declared foe of Rationalism, Ritschl contrived to make the Christian doctrines seem eminently reasonable to all who make the great fundamental assumption that is involved in the Christian idea of God. From the theistic point of view, it is easy to believe that God is to be thought of in terms of the purest and noblest that has come within our ken—even Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ represented in His life the purpose of God, that He calls us to the Kingdom which stands for all forms of high and unselfish service of man and that the inspiration of our piety and our



power for service come ultimately from Christ, and are mediated through the Church which He founded.

It would therefore appear to be properly matter of satisfaction to all who occupy the Christian standpoint that a synthesis of the truths of Christianity should have been forcibly preached to a generation which has been largely affected with the spirit of Agnosticism, and even with materialistic ideas. On the other hand it may be objected that this is a case in which the good is the enemy of the better, and even that a selection of Christian truths, if offered as a substitute for the whole truth, may prove to be positively injurious, and may act not as food but as poison. In regard to this point we have to make clear to our minds what is the precise bearing of truth and error which we are discussing. We may look at it from the point of view of the ancient Church and of the older Protestantism—with the presupposition that there is a minimum of orthodox belief which is necessary for the attainment of eternal salvation, and also a degree of heresy which entails the penalty of eternal punishment; and from this assumption it is natural and indeed inevitable to view an impoverished scheme of Christian doctrine with indignation and horror, and to oppose it with all the concentrated purpose and wrath of the ancient polemics. If we cease to argue the matter, as is now generally agreed, from an eschatological point of view, and confine ourselves to testing the value of a system for sustaining the Christian experience and the Christian hope, it is natural to take up a much more charitable attitude towards the more meagre types of Christian doctrine. It is, indeed, supremely intelligible that a reduced scheme of Christianity should be still earnestly opposed as offending against those who possess a stronger faith

and hold a fuller creed, and as threatening to deprive them of spiritual blessings which they possess, or to weaken their sense of security in regard to them. But it is possible to believe that there is a perfect form of Christian doctrine which is needed to enable the Christian religion to produce its full results, and at the same time to hold that other systems have a real, if a lower, degree of spiritual utility, and to suppose that it is better for a sect or school to receive some benefit from a defective version of Christianity than that they should ignore it and receive no Christian benefit whatever. The truth is that the Christian religion, like mother-earth, sustains great multitudes in very varying degrees of health, comfort and well-being; and we may be thankful in both cases that, even where privation and hardship prevail, there is at least a livelihood. There is a further parallel that as population tends to migrate from the poorer places to richer and more hospitable climes, so there is evidence of a spiritual tendency which leads human souls, if they have found a footing in the world of Christian faith at all, to press on from the colder and darker regions to the sphere of a fuller faith and a richer life. Of this there are illustrations in the later history of the Ritschlian School. It seems clear that the Ritschlian version of Christian doctrine is adequate to enable the Christian religion to do a considerable part of its work among men of a particular grade of culture and experience; and when the Christian religion gets to work its normal effect is that, not in grace only, but in knowledge, there is growth to more and more.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

WE have thus attempted to define the salient features of those types of Christianity which have attained importance by embodying themselves in a great ecclesiastical organisation, or by dominating wide spheres of theological thinking. In conclusion, something may be said of the comparative value of these types, and also of the conditions of the larger task of Dogmatic Theology to which the study of the nature of the Christian religion is a preliminary contribution.

In the first place, the survey which we have made leaves the impression that, in spite of the ecclesiastical and theological divisions of Christendom, there is a groundwork of the Christian religion which is traceable in the divergent forms, and which invests all with an unmistakable family likeness. It may also be observed that forces have been at work in history which ensured that divergence from the true type should not proceed beyond a certain length. Whenever a process of corruption or disintegration advanced so far as to threaten loss of identity, a protest was raised against the loss and defacement, and a successful attempt was made to restore its purity or integrity. The service rendered in the Reformation was to purify the decadent Christianity of the Middle Ages by a return to the Christianity attested in the original sources. And similarly the



main significance of modern theology, as represented by Schleiermacher and Ritschl, lay in the fact that it revolted against the disfigurement and weakening which Christianity had suffered at the hands of Rationalism, and that it sought to recover a larger measure of the blessings and of the power of the Christian religion.

Of the types of Christianity which have been passed under review, there are two which can be somewhat confidently set down as pathological. Roman Catholicism is a pathological development from patristic Christianity, Rationalism from Protestant Christianity. The epithet is justified by the fact that they both have the effect of impairing the individuality and vitality of Christianity by humanising experiments on a divine religion. But they took different ways to the same end. The radical vice of Romanism was that it sought to enrich the Christian religion by importing into it theories and practices which belonged to an earlier and a lower religious plane, and whose additional value for faith and life was only illusory. The contrary vice of Rationalism was that it sought to amend Christianity by impoverishing it. It is also an important point of contrast, as was already remarked, that Roman Catholicism makes too little of the power of truth in its reliance on the system of sacramental grace, and that Rationalism makes too much of ideas in treating them as a substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost.

But next, it is impossible to regard the type of patristic orthodoxy as other than a one-sided representation of the substance of the Christian religion. The view has been taken in these lectures that its work of dogmatic definition was of real religious value—con-

cerned as it was to safeguard the Christian idea of God as revealed in Christ, while no alternative definitions of the Godhead and of the Person of Christ have so far been framed which have been widely accepted as fitted to meet the demand which is made upon God in Christ as the ground of the Christian salvation. But it is equally clear that the patristic Church showed a want of the sense of proportion, and also of insight, in its apprehension of the Christian religion as a whole. Its conception of the religious blessings was sensibly vitiated by the influence of the ascetic ideal, which led to the exclusion or under-valuation of much that is embraced in the purpose of God to enrich the world by the establishment therein of His divine Kingdom. More particularly, in its attitude towards the all-important topic of the conditions of salvation, patristic orthodoxy was indefinite or superficial. The bearing of the work of Christ upon justification or the forgiveness of sins was not investigated with any thoroughness before Anselm. It is a more serious defect that the theories of the subjective condition of forgiveness were handled in a form which on the one hand compromised the doctrines of grace, and on the other hand fostered a type of thinking which is one of the most pestilent of the heresies. In one connection the Gospel was compromised by conjoining evangelical obedience with faith as the ground of justification. In another connection it seemed to teach that the faith which is accepted for salvation is the intellectual appropriation of the dogmas of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, and that heretical aberrations of opinion in regard to these mysteries entails the forfeiture of eternal salvation.

It was the signal achievement and the permanent

service of Protestantism that it possessed the insight to penetrate to the core of the Christian religion, that it did justice to the main aspects of that religion as a God-guaranteed salvation resting on the basis of grace, and in particular that it worked out the theory of the individual appropriation of salvation with remarkable consistency, profundity and impressiveness. In its understanding of the essential parts of Christianity, and in its realisation of the organic connection of the three main divisions of doctrine, it did work which cannot be superseded and become obsolete. On the other hand, the old Protestantism fell into the same error as Romanism in exaggerating the amount of knowledge which it had at its disposal as a custodian and interpreter of Revelation. There is a widespread feeling, even among devout and believing Protestants, that the systematic treatises of Protestant orthodoxy can only be studied with a feeling of unresponsiveness and even discomfort; and this is due to the fact that there is mixed up with the treasured and imperishable elements of the Gospel, and handled as if all were supported by the same authority, a mass of doctrinal matter which is suspect as to its origin and truth, and which at the best is seen to be of little value. It is this fact which gave to theological Rationalism its vitality; and the mission of modern theology—especially of the schools of Schleiermacher and Ritschl—was not only to prevent the radical transformation of Christianity at the hands of Rationalism, but to relieve it of matter which had become an intellectual burden, and which had become a hindrance rather than a help in the life of the spirit. This must in honesty be admitted, even if it be thought, in the line of our foregoing criticisms, that Schleiermacher, and in a



lesser degree Ritschl, crossed the line at which the re-casting of the doctrinal system became a process of mutilation.

As a fact the doctrinal material which is expounded in the traditional system of Protestantism is derived from a variety of sources, and different strata of it are accompanied by very different degrees of certainty. We have to distinguish between the integral elements of the Gospel—in regard to which Christian faith has an absolute assurance—and the related problems which have to be attacked in a more philosophic spirit, and in regard to which we may not hope to attain to more than a probable opinion. It is now widely recognised in Protestant theology that the *modus operandi* of the atoning work of Christ is not settled by revelation, but is rather a problem which is raised by revelation, and of which a variety of solutions is properly tolerated in every thinking Church. It is also observable that in the living message of the Protestant pulpit it is little felt that an exposition of the Christian Gospel must lay the foundation in a dogmatic pronouncement as to the original condition of the first man, and the circumstances and consequences of the Fall: it is taken for granted that there is an adequate foundation in the assured verities that man as known to us is made in God's image, and is subject to sin; and this practical treatment of the question of human origins as a non-vital and speculative problem Protestant theology is increasingly likely to endorse in deliberate dogmatic theory. In the realm of Eschatology there is also a growing feeling that the degree of revealed knowledge has been exaggerated. The field is luminous with the great certainty that Christ has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers; but there is a severe economy

of revelation in regard to the experiences which follow death in the case of believers, while the intermediate condition, and the ultimate destiny of the wicked, seem to be subjects in which we are thrown back on inferential reasoning (that may seem inconclusive) from the revealed nature of God on the one hand, and from the facts of sin and of human character on the other.

At another point in the traditional system of Protestant doctrine there is a widespread feeling of discomfort, and the felt need of a fresh manipulation of the material. In the treatment of the topics connected with the individual appropriation of salvation—the *Ordo Salutis* of Dogmatics—there was traced a type of religious experience which was assumed to be the normal, and indeed the only legitimate type. But while in the Protestant theory there was only recognised a form and sequence of religious experiences which was modelled on a religious history such as that of Augustine, Luther, and the evangelical saints, in practice it was recognised that there were many among the best of ordinary Christians—identifiable as such by a Christian character, and an underlying faith and penitence—whose experiences could not easily be fitted into the stereotyped scheme. At this point there is much room for revised work on the basis of a fuller study, not only of New Testament psychology, but also of the concrete manifestations in modern life of Christian experience and character.

The view that has been taken of the content of the Gospel and its implications as the sum of assured Christian truth undoubtedly makes the detailed work of Dogmatic Theology more difficult, and also makes the secondary doctrines less stable. In religion and

theology we instinctively desire to be sure of everything; and there is a natural dislike of a theology which handles any doctrinal topic with indecision, and which dismisses it with a modest claim to speculative probability, or even with a confession of ignorance. But in the long run it can only be a gain if theology makes clear that it operates at different points with varying degrees of certainty; and that it draws a very definite distinction between the central doctrinal content of Christianity, of whose truth it has an absolute persuasion, and those secondary doctrines which have been provocative of so much debate because they had the character of problems, and which were really a bequest from revelation to the inquiring and speculative activity of the Christian mind.

The central content of the Christian revelation, the gospel which forms the soul and power of the Christian religion, is on an altogether different footing from the speculative utterances made by theology in the outlying provinces of religious thought. It passes down from generation to generation under the protection of experience and of God. It is accredited afresh from age to age by the fact that it is an engine for doing spiritual work of the most valuable kind, and that those who make use of it find that it makes good its promises. It is also authenticated by a conviction of its truth wrought in the hearts of those who live by it, which shows such strength, tenacity and energising activity that they confidently interpret it as a gift of God through the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Religion, we are told by the writer to the Hebrews, has its disciplines of dislodgment, but it is to the end that the things which cannot be shaken may stand out more clearly in their changeless grandeur and their



immovable strength. The mind is ever interested in novelties; but the heart ever seeks the permanent and unchangeable, and is assured that its quest is not vain, according to the song of our pilgrimage:—

‘His truth at all times firmly stood  
And shall from age to age endure.’

## APPENDIX A

### TERTULLIAN ON SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

ERGO non ad Scripturas provocandum est; nec in his constituendum certamen, in quibus aut nulla, aut incerta victoria est, aut par incertae. Nam etsi non ita evaderet conlatio Scripturarum, ut utramque partem parem sisteret, ordo rerum desiderabat illud prius proponi, quod nunc solum disputandum est: Quibus competat fides ipsa? Cujus sint Scripturae? A quo, et per quos, et quando, et quibus sit tradita disciplina qua fiunt Christiani? Ubi enim apparuerit esse veritatem et disciplinae et fidei christianae, illic erit veritas Scripturarum et expositionum, et omnium traditionum Christianarum.

Tertullian: *Liber de Praescriptionibus*, Cap. xix.

Migne: *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Latina, Tomus II. Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. xv., 1870.

Hinc igitur dirigimus praescriptionem: si Dominus Jesus Christus apostolos misit ad praedicandum, alios non esse recipiendos praedicatores, quam Christus instituit: quia nec alius Patrem novit nisi Filius, et cui Filius revelavit, nec aliis videtur revelasse Filius, quam apostolis quos misit ad praedicandum, utique quod illis revelavit. Quid autem praedicaverint, id est, quid illis Christus revelaverit, et hic praescribam non aliter probari debere, nisi per easdem Ecclesias, quas ipsi apostoli condiderunt, ipsi eis praedicando, tam viva, quod aiunt, voce, quam per epistolas postea. Si haec ita sunt, constat proinde omnem doctrinam quae cum illis Ecclesiis apostolicis, matricibus et originalibus fidei, conspiret, veritati deputandam, sine dubio tenentem quod

Ecclesiae ab apostolis, apostoli a Christo, Christus a Deo accepit; reliquam vero omnem doctrinam de mendacio praejudicandam, quae sapiat contra veritatem Ecclesiarum, et apostolorum, et Christi, et Dei. Superest ergo uti demonstremus, an haec nostra doctrina, cujus regulam supra edidimus, de apostolorum traditione censeatur, et hoc ipso, an caeterae de mendacio veniant. Communicans cum Ecclesiis apostolicis, quod nulli doctrina diversa: hoc est testimonium veritatis.

*Ibid.*, Cap. xxi.

## A P P E N D I X B

### THE VINCENTIAN RULE

SAEPE igitur magno studio et summa attentione perquirens a quamplurimis sanctitate et doctrina praestantibus viris quonam modo possim certa quadam et quasi generali ac regulari via catholicae fidei veritatem ab haereticae pravitate falsitate discernere, hujusmodi semper responsum ab omnibus fere retuli, quod sive ego, sive quis alius vellet exsurgentium haeticorum fraudes deprehendere laqueosque vitare, et in fide sana sanus atque integer permanere duplici modo munire fidem suam, Domino adjuvante, deberet: primum scilicet divinae legis auctoritate, tum deinde Ecclesiae catholicae traditione. Hic forsitan requirat aliquis: Cum se, perfectus Scripturarum Canon, sibi que ad omnia satis superque sufficiat, quid opus est ut ei Ecclesiasticae intelligentiae jungatur auctoritas? Quia videlicet Scripturam sacram pro ipsa sua altitudine non uno eodemque sensu universi accipiunt, sed ejusdem eloquia aliter atque aliter alius atque alius interpretatur; ut pene quot homines sunt, tot illinc sententiae erui posse videantur. Aliter namque illam Novatianus, aliter Sabellius, aliter Donatus exponit,



aliter Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius ; aliter Photinus, Appollinaris, Priscillianus, aliter Jovinianus, Pelagius, Caelestius ; aliter postremo Nestorius. Atque idcirco multum necesse est, propter tantos tam varii erroris anfractus, ut propheticae et apostolicae interpretationis linea secundum Ecclesiastici et Catholici sensus normam dirigatur. In ipsa item Catholica Ecclesia magnopere curandum est ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est. Hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum, quod ipsa vis nominis ratioque declarat, quae omnia fere universaliter comprehendit. Sed hoc ita demum fiet, si sequamur universitatem, antiquitatem, consensionem. Sequemur autem universitatem hoc modo, si hanc unam fidem veram esse fateamur quam tota per orbem terrarum confitetur Ecclesia ; antiquitatem vero ita, si ab his sensibus nullatenus recedamus quos sanctos majores ac patres nostros celebrasse manifestum est : consensionem quoque itidem, si, ipsa vetustate, omnium vel certe pene omnium sacerdotum pariter et magistrorum definitiones sententiasque sectemur.

Vincentii Lirinensis Commonitorium Primum. Tractatus Peregrini pro Catholicae fidei antiquitate et universitate adversus profanas omnium haereticorum novitates. Migne : *Patrologiae completus Concursus*, Series Latina, Tomus L. Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, vol. xi., 1894.

## APPENDIX C

### THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEORY OF THE RULE OF FAITH

#### I.—THE ORIGINAL SOURCE OF DOCTRINE.

[EVANGELIUM] quod promissum ante per prophetas in Scripturis sanctis, Dominus noster Jesus Christus, Dei Filius,

proprio ore primum promulgavit, deinde per suos apostolos, tanquam fontem omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae, omni creaturae praedicari jussit.

*Canones et Decreta Dogmatica Concilii Tridentini,  
Sessio Quarta.*

Eadem sancta mater ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse; . . . attamen placuisse ejus sapientiae et bonitati, alia, eaque supernaturali via se ipsum ac aeterna voluntatis suae decreta humano generi revelare.

*Decreta Dogmatica Concilii Vaticani,  
De Fide Catholica, Cap. ii.*

Neque enim Petri successoribus Spiritus Sanctus promissus est, ut eo revelante novam doctrinam patefacerent, sed ut, eo assistente, traditam per Apostolos revelationem seu fidei depositum sancte custodirent et fideliter exponerent.

*Ibid., De Ecclesia Christi, Cap. iv.*

## II.—THE TWOFOLD CHANNEL BY WHICH REVELATION HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED (REPOSITORIES OF REVELATION).

Perspiciensque [Synodus] hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus, quae ab ipsius Christi ore ab apostolis acceptae, aut ab ipsis apostolis, Spiritu Sancto dictante, quasi per manus traditae ad nos usque pervenerunt; orthodoxorum patrum exempla secuta, omnes libros tam Veteris quam Novi Testamenti, cum utriusque unus Deus sit auctor, necnon traditiones ipsas, tum ad fidem, tum ad mores pertinentes, tanquam vel oretenus a Christo vel a Spiritu Sancto dictatas, et continua successione in ecclesia catholica conservatas, pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia suscipit et veneratur.

*Conc. Trid., Sessio Quarta.*

III.—CONTENT AND TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE, WHICH  
INCLUDES THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA.

Synodus . . . statuit et declarat, ut haec ipsa vetus et vulgata editio, quae longo tot saeculorum usu in ipsa ecclesia probata est, in publicis lectionibus, disputationibus, praedicationibus et expositionibus pro authentica habeatur, et ut nemo illam rejicere quovis praetextu audeat vel praesumat.

*Conc. Trid., Sessio Quarta.*

IV.—RULE FOR VERIFICATION OF DIVINE AND  
APOSTOLIC TRADITIONS.

Porro fide divina et Catholica ea omnia credenda sunt, quae in verbo Dei scripto vel tradito continentur, et ab Ecclesia sive solemnii iudicio sive ordinario et universali magisterio tamquam divinitus revelata credenda proponuntur.

*Decreta Dogmatica Concilii Vaticani,  
De Fide Catholica, Cap. iii.*

V.—THE CHURCH THE INFALLIBLE TEACHER, AND IN  
PARTICULAR THE AUTHORITATIVE INTERPRETER OF  
SCRIPTURE.

Praeterea ad coercenda petulantia ingenia, decernit, ut nemo, suae prudentiae innixus, in rebus fidei, et morum ad aedificationem doctrinae christianae pertinentium, sacram scripturam ad suos sensus contorquens, contra eum sensum, quem tenuit et tenet sancta mater ecclesia, cujus est iudicare de vero sensu, et interpretatione scripturarum sanctarum, aut etiam contra unanimem consensum patrum ipsam scripturam sacram interpretari audeat, etiamsi hujusmodi interpretationes nullo unquam tempore in lucem edendae forent.

*Conc. Trid., Sessio Quarta, cf. Conc. Vat.,  
De Fide Catholica, Cap. ii.*



## VI.—THE PAPAL ORGAN OF THE INFALLIBLE CHURCH.

*(a) The Institution of the Primacy*

Docemus itaque et declaramus, juxta Evangelii testimonia primatum jurisdictionis in universam Dei Ecclesiam immediate et directe beato Petro Apostolo promissum atque collatum a Christo Domino fuisse.

*Conc. Vat., De Ecclesia Christi, Cap. i.*

*(b) The Transmission of the Primacy*

Nulli sane dubium, imo saeculis omnibus notum est, quod sanctus beatissimusque Petrus, Apostolorum princeps et caput fideique columna, et Ecclesiae Catholicae fundamentum, a Domino nostro Jesu Christo, Salvatore humani generis ac Redemptore, claves regni accepit: qui ad hoc usque tempus et semper in suis successoribus, episcopis sanctae Romanae Sedis, ab ipso fundatae, ejusque consecratae sanguine, vivit et praesidet et judicium exercet.

*Ibid., Cap. ii.*

*(c) The Jurisdiction of the Papacy*

Et quoniam divino Apostolici primatus jure Romanus Pontifex universae Ecclesiae praeest, docemus etiam et declaramus eum esse judicem supremum fidelium, et in omnibus causis ad examen ecclesiasticum spectantibus ad ipsius posse judicium recurri; Sedis vero Apostolicae, cujus auctoritate major non est, judicium a nemine fore retractandum, neque cuiquam de ejus licere judicare judicio.

*Ibid., Cap. iii.*

*(d) The Dogmatic Power of the Supreme Pontiff*

Ipsa autem Apostolico primatu, quem Romanus Pontifex, tamquam Petri principis Apostolorum successor, in universam

Écclesiam obtinet, supremam quoque magisterii potestatem comprehendi, haec Sancta Sedes semper tenuit, perpetuus Ecclesiae usus comprobat, etc.

*Ibid.*, Cap. iv.

Itaque Nos traditioni a fidei Christianae exordio perceptae fideliter inhaerendo, ad Dei Salvatoris nostri gloriam religionis Catholicae exaltationem et Christianorum populorum salutem, sacro approbante Concilio, docemus et divinitus revelatum dogma esse definimus: Romanum Pontificem, cum ex Cathedra loquitur, id est, cum omnium Christianorum pastoris et doctoris munere fungens pro suprema sua Apostolica auctoritate doctrinam de fide vel moribus ab universa Ecclesia tenendam definit, per assistentiam divinam, ipsi in beato Petro promissam, ea infallibilitate pollere, qua divinus Redemptor Ecclesiam suam in definienda doctrina de fide vel moribus instructam esse voluit: ideoque ejusmodi Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles esse.

*Ibid.*, Cap. iv.

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## APPENDIX D

### THE CRITERIA OF APOSTOLIC TRADITIONS

SEQUITUR nunc ut ostendamus, quibus viis ac rationibus indagandum sit, quae sint verae ac germanae Apostolorum Traditiones.

Prima igitur regula est. Quando universa Ecclesia aliquid tanquam Fidei dogma amplectitur, quod non invenitur in divinis Literis, necesse est dicere, ex Apostolorum Traditione id haberi. Talis est perpetua virginitas B. Mariae, numerus librorum Canonicorum, et similia.

Secunda regula est. Quando universa Ecclesia aliquid servat, quod nemo constituere potuit, nisi Deus, quod tamen

nusquam invenitur scriptum, necesse est dicere, ab ipso Christo et Apostolis ejus traditum. Tale est etiam, Baptismum haereticorum esse ratum.

Tertia regula est. Id quod in Ecclesia universa, et omnibus retro temporibus servatum est, merito ab Apostolis creditur institutum, etiam si illud tale sit, ut potuerit ab Ecclesia institui. Exemplo sit jejunium Quadragesimae.

Quarta regula est. Cum omnes Doctores Ecclesiae communi consensu docent, aliquid ex apostolica Traditione descendere, sive in Concilio generali congregati, sive scribentes, seorsim in libris, illud credendum est apostolicam esse Traditionem. Exemplum primi est, imaginum veneratio, quam esse ex apostolica Traditione asseruerunt Doctores Ecclesiae congregati in Concilio Nicaeno II generali. Exemplum secundi vix invenitur, si debeant omnes penitus Patres qui scripserunt expresse aliquid dicere: tamen videtur sufficere, si aliquot Patres magni nominis expresse id afferant et caeteri non contradicant, cum tamen ejus rei meminerint; tunc enim illa esse omnium sententia non temere dici poterit, quando enim in re gravi aliquis Veterum erravit, semper multi inveniuntur qui contradicunt.

Quinta regula est. Id sine dubio credendum esse ex apostolica Traditione descendere, quod pro tali habetur in illis Ecclesiis, ubi est integra et continuata successio ab Apostolis.

Si ergo in aliqua Ecclesia ascendendo per Episcopos sibi invicem succedentes perveniamus ad Apostolum aliquem, et non possit ostendi, quod ullus eorum Episcoporum introduxerit novam doctrinam: certi sumus ibi conservari apostolicas Traditiones. . . . at nunc defecit certa successio in omnibus Ecclesiis Apostolicis, praeterquam in Romana, et ideo ex testimonio hujus solius Ecclesiae sumi potest certum argumentum ad probandas apostolicas Traditiones; ac tum potissimum, cum doctrina, vel ritus earum Ecclesiarum a doctrina, et ritibus Ecclesiae Romanae dissentiant.

Bellarmino, *De Verbo Dei*, Lib. IV. Cap. ix.; in *Opera* 1721, Tom. i. p. 93 ff.



## APPENDIX E

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

(1) THE presupposition of Luther's theological thinking was that the Bible is the Word of God, given by revelation of the Holy Spirit, and that it alone transmits and proves the truths of revelation.

*Note.*—It is 'particularly the book, writing and word of the Holy Spirit.' 'I will not waste a word in arguing with one who does not consider that the Scriptures are the Word of God: we ought not to dispute with a man who thus rejects first principles.'—Köstlin, *op. cit.*<sup>2</sup> p. 7 ff.

(2) Scripture is known to be the Word of God, not merely because of external testimony, but because of an inwardly wrought conviction of its truth which nothing can overthrow.

'Not only has it so happened, not only is it so proclaimed in the Word of the Gospel, but the Holy Ghost also writes it inwardly in the heart.'—*E. A.*, xxiii. 250. 'Even though an angel from heaven and all the world should preach against it, we ought to believe, for the reason that it is God's Word, and that we have an inward feeling that it is the truth.'—xxviii. 340.

(3) The burden of Scripture is Christ, or the Gospel of Redemption through faith in Jesus Christ,<sup>a</sup> and those portions of Scripture in which Christ is most fully and clearly set forth are to be used as the key to, and the touchstone of, the whole.<sup>b</sup>

(a) 'Christus dominus et rex Scripturae.'—Köstlin<sup>2</sup>, ii. 14 ff.

'In this all sound sacred books agree that they preach

<sup>1</sup> Köstlin, *Luther's Theologie*, 1863, 2<sup>te</sup> Auf. 1901; E. Tr., Hay, *The Theology of Luther*, 2 vols., 1897. Luther, *Sämmtliche Werke*. Erlanger Ausgabe, 1826 ff.; Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar, 1883 ff.

Christ and occupy themselves with Christ. That is the proper test by which to judge all books—whether they preach Christ, since all Scripture manifests Christ, and St. Paul was determined to know nothing save Christ (1 Cor. ii. 2). That which does not preach Christ is not apostolic, though it came from St. Peter or St. Paul. Contrariwise what preaches Christ would be apostolic even though it came from Judas or Annas or Pilate or Herod.’—*Vorrede zur deutschen Bibelübersetzung, ibid.*, lxiii. 156-7.

(b) ‘The Gospel and the first Epistle of St. John, the Epistles of St. Paul, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and also 1 Peter, are the books which show thee Christ, and teach everything which it is necessary for salvation (needful and blessed) to know, though thou shouldst never see or hear another doctrine or book.’—*Ibid.*, p. 115.

(4) A human element in Scripture was recognised by Luther in three forms—(a) in the secondary position of certain writers, or groups of writers, who wrote in dependence on immediate instruments of revelation; (b) in the admixture of human ideas with the divine Word; and even (c) in the obscuration of the Gospel in certain writings which have a place in the Canon.

(a) He speaks of the prophets as so far dependent on Moses, and of the sages and historians as doing their work on the basis of the older instruction. Similarly in the New Testament there are writers that were pupils of those who had received from Christ.—Köstlin, *op. cit.* ii. 14 ff. There are also degrees among the prophets. Isaiah is ‘propheta maxima insignis et summe illuminatus.’

(b) The Old Testament prophets, infallible in regard to the things of Christ, could err in mundane affairs.—*Ibid.*, i. p. 388. A like observation is made of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which ‘contains some difficult knots, though it expounds in masterly wise its chief article—the priesthood of Christ.’—*Ibid.*, xv. 139.

(c) ‘In comparison with these [the Pauline Epistles] the

Epistle of James is a right strawy epistle, for it has nothing of the evangelical manner.'—*E. A.*, lxiii. 115. 'It must have been composed by a Jew who had heard the sound of Christian bells, but who had not caught the chimes.' 'Jakobus delirat.'—Köstlin, *op. cit.* ii. 33. The Apocalypse he could not deem either apostolic or prophetic, since he could not feel that it proceeded from the Holy Ghost. 'Liber obscurus et incertus.' But later utterances were more appreciative.—Köstlin, *op. cit.* ii. 31 ff.

(5) The powers of reason were estimated by Luther in strict consistency with a doctrine of original sin and total depravity; and while he recognised reason as paying some homage to God and duty, he regarded it as incompetent to handle the things of religion apart from the experience of regeneration, as strongly disposed to unbelief, and as the tool by which Satan had wrought much mischief in theology.

*Note.*—Köstlin, ii. 48 ff.; *E. A.*, x. 206 ff.

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## APPENDIX F

### WESTMINSTER DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

I. ALTHOUGH the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.



II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the Books of the Old and New Testaments. (Here follows list of the Canonical Books.) All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

III. The Books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

VI. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God

to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word ; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

VII. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all ; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical ; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself ; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

X. The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of

religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

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## A P P E N D I X G

### BARCLAY'S PROPOSITIONS

#### I

*(Concerning the True Foundation of Knowledge)*

SEEING the height of all happiness is placed in the true knowledge of God ('this is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent') the true and right understanding of this foundation, and ground of knowledge, is that which is most necessary to be known and believed in the first place.

#### II

*(Concerning Immediate Revelation)*

Seeing 'no man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth Him'; and seeing 'the revelation of the Son is in and by the Spirit'; therefore the testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be, only revealed; who, as by the moving of His own Spirit, converted the chaos of this world into that wonderful order, wherein it was in the beginning, and created man a living soul, to rule and govern it; so by the revelation of the same Spirit, He hath manifested Himself all along unto the sons of men, both patriarchs, prophets and apostles; which revelations of God by the Spirit, whether by outward voices and appearances, dreams, or inward objective manifestations in the heart, were of old the formal object



of their faith, and remain yet so to be ; since the object of the saints' faith is the same in all ages, though set forth under divers administrations. Moreover, these divine inward revelations, which we make absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do nor can ever contradict the outward testimony of the Scriptures, or right and sound reason. Yet from hence it will not follow, that these divine revelations are to be subjected to the examination, either of the outward testimony of the Scriptures, or of the natural reason of man, as to a more noble or certain rule or touchstone. For this divine revelation, and inward illumination, is that which is evident and clear of itself, forcing by its own evidence and clearness, the well-disposed understanding to assent, irresistibly moving the same thereunto, even as the common principles of natural truths move and incline the mind to a natural assent : as that 'the whole is greater than its part' ; that 'two contradictory sayings cannot be both true, nor both false' : which is also manifest, according to our adversaries' principle, who (supposing the possibility of inward divine revelations) will nevertheless confess with us, that neither Scripture nor sound reason will contradict it. And yet it will not follow, according to them, that the Scripture, or sound reason should be subjected to the examination of the divine revelations in the heart.

### III

#### *(Concerning the Scriptures)*

From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints have proceeded the Scriptures of truth, which contain—1. A faithful historical account of the actings of God's people in divers ages, with many singular and remarkable providences attending them. 2. A prophetic account of several things, whereof some are already past, and some yet to come. 3. A full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ held forth in divers precious declarations,

exhortations, and sentences, which, by the moving of God's Spirit, were at several times, and upon sundry occasions, spoken and written unto some churches and their pastors: nevertheless, because they are only a declaration of the 'fountain,' and not the 'fountain' itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the 'adequate primary rule' of 'faith and manners.' Nevertheless, as that which giveth a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty; for as by the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them, so they testify, that the Spirit is that Guide, by which the saints are led into all truth: therefore, according to the Scriptures, the Spirit is the first and principal leader. And seeing we do therefore receive and believe the Scriptures because they proceeded from the Spirit; therefore also the Spirit is more originally and principally the Rule, according to the received maxim in the schools, *propter quod unumquodque est tale, illud ipsum est magis tale*. Englished thus: That for which a thing is such, that thing itself is more such.

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## APPENDIX H

### THE THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF SCHLEIERMACHER<sup>1</sup>

#### A. SCOPE (SUBJECT-MATTER AND FUNCTION) OF DOGMATICS.

'DOGOMATIC Theology is the science which systematises the doctrine prevalent (*geltend*) in a Christian Church at a given time.'—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 19.

<sup>1</sup> *Kurze Darstellung des Theologischen Studiums*, 1818; *Der Christliche Glaube* (1<sup>ste</sup> Auf. 1821; 3<sup>te</sup> 1835).

‘The systematic exposition of doctrine prevalent at a given time, whether in the universal Church when undivided, or in a particular Church, we describe as dogmatics or dogmatic theology.’—*K. D.*, p. 97.

‘By prevalent doctrine is by no means to be understood merely confessional matter, but all didactic propositions which are a dogmatic expression of what is heard in the public acts of the Church as an expression of the common piety. It includes what may be taught only in particular quarters of the Church, so long as this is not the occasion of strife and separation.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 19, 3.

‘Everything is to be regarded as prevalent which is officially proclaimed and accepted without arousing official contradiction.’—*K. D.*, p. 196, note.

*Note.—Exclusion of Philosophical Matter.*—‘The science which undertakes the systematisation of doctrine has as its aim, partly to clear up the confusion of thought as to the states of religious feeling, partly to distinguish this thought from speculation which is of diverse origin, and which deals with the same materials.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>1</sup>, i. p. 2.

The alien type of thought is the philosophical. ‘That this is different in origin and in form, and that a combination of philosophical and dogmatic material is illegitimate, is a fundamental idea of the present work.’—*Ibid.*, note *b*.

## B. RELIGIOUS FEELING THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF DOCTRINE.

‘The science of the Christian faith has a twofold aim—first to expound in the form of doctrine the states of devout Christian feeling, and secondly to systematise what comes to expression as doctrine.’—*Ch. Gl.*, p. 3.

‘Christian doctrines are interpretations of the states of devout Christian feeling expressed by the medium of language.’—*Ibid.*<sup>3</sup>, i. p. 16.

Religious feeling, like all strong emotion, seeks outward



expression. At the lowest stage it finds expression in inarticulate cries, movements, gestures, later in symbolical acts. At a higher stage the feelings were made the subject of reflection, and gave rise to ideas. In Christianity from the first the experiences were described and interpreted in an accompanying doctrine, which was set forth in three forms—poetical, rhetorical, and didactic. The process culminated in dogmas—‘propositions of the delineative and didactic type in which the highest possible degree of accuracy is aimed at.’ But in every case the ideas point back to feeling as their source.

‘Doctrinal propositions of every form have their ultimate ground so exclusively in the excitations of the religious consciousness that, where the latter do not exist, the former also cannot arise.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, i. 15, 16.

### C. THE FEELINGS OF WHICH THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ARE AN EXPRESSION OR INTERPRETATION.

(1) *The Religious Feeling in General.*—‘What is common to all expressions of religious feeling, however they may differ otherwise, and what distinguishes them from all other feelings—in other words the permanent essence of religion, consists in this, that we are conscious of ourselves as absolutely dependent, or as standing in relation to God.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, i. 4.

(2) *The Specific Content of the Christian Religion.*—‘Christianity is a monotheistic faith belonging to the class of teleological (ethical) religions, which is essentially distinguished from other religions of the kind by the circumstance that everything in it is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.’—*Ibid.*, p. 11.

(3) *The Varieties of Christian Feeling.*

(a) The general religious feeling of dependence upon God which is presupposed in Christian experience (Sense of Dependence).

- (b) The feeling of alienation from God, or of inability to enjoy a constant feeling of right relation to God (Sense of Sin).
- (c) The feeling of reconciliation to God, or of capacity to enjoy a constant feeling of right relation to God resting on the redemptive work of Christ (Sense of Grace).

‘The peculiarity of Christian piety consists in the fact that we are conscious of our inward alienation from God as originally our own act, which we call sin, and of communion with God as resting upon a communication of the Redeemer which we call grace.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>1</sup>, i. 63.

The term Redemption, it is said, denotes generally the deliverance out of an evil condition, conceived as one of bondage, into a better state by means of the help of another. In the religious sphere the evil condition can only consist in this that the vitality of the higher self-consciousness is obstructed or destroyed, or, in other words, that the feeling of absolute dependence is repressed. Redemption means the emancipation and perfecting of this feeling through the work of Christ, in such wise that it permeates experience as a whole.—*Ibid.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 11.

#### D. THE THREE FORMS OF DOCTRINE AND THEIR IDENTICAL CONTENT.

‘All propositions which the science of Christian doctrine has to propound may be framed either as descriptions of vital human experiences, or as conceptions of the attributes and activities of God, or as affirmations as to the constitution of the world; and all three forms have ever existed alongside of one another.’—*Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, i. 30.

The basal element in dogmatics, it is added, is the description of subjective states. Doctrines relating to God and the world are only permissible so far as they can be developed out of propositions of the first type. In the first edition it

was expressly declared that doctrines relating to God and the world contain nothing which is not already contained in the doctrines which describe subjective states (i. p. 34, note 2). But it is also declared that if theology restricted itself to religious psychology it would lose touch with history, and would fail of its primary purpose of edifying the Church. —*Ibid.*, note 3, cf. *Ch. Gl.*<sup>3</sup>, i. 30, 3.

*E.* THE SYSTEMATISATION OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AS THE DEPOSIT FROM THE THREE VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN FEELING.

- I. Doctrines derived from the general feeling of dependence on God.
  - (1) Doctrines descriptive of the religious feeling of dependence in our capacity as creaturely beings.
  - (2) Doctrines of the divine attributes expressive of the relation between God and the world—Eternity, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience.
  - (3) Doctrines of the constitution of the world—original Condition of the World and of Man.
  
- II. Doctrines derived from the feeling of alienation from God, or the sense of Sin.
  - (1) Doctrines descriptive of the condition of man as a sinful being—original Sin, actual Sin.
  - (2) Doctrines of the constitution of the world in relation to sin—physical Evil, the punishment of Sin.
  - (3) Doctrines of the divine attributes which relate to the sense of sin—Holiness, Righteousness (Compassion).
  
- III. Doctrines derived from the feeling of reconciliation to God on the ground of redemption, or the sense of grace.
  - (1) Doctrines descriptive of the condition of the Christian so far as conscious of divine grace.



- (a) The Mediation of Redemption—the Person and Work of Christ.
- (b) The realisation of Redemption in experience—Regeneration, Sanctification.
- (2) Doctrines of the constitution of the World in relation to Redemption—the Church in its origin, its relation to the world and its work (including the Sacraments and other means of grace), and its consummation (including the topics of Eschatology).
- (3) Doctrines of the divine attributes which relate to Redemption—Love, Wisdom.

Conclusion—the doctrine of the Holy Trinity which is implied in the foregoing treatment.

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## APPENDIX I

### THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RITSCHLIAN THEOLOGY

#### A. THE FUNCTION, SOURCE, AND NORM OF DOGMATICS.<sup>1</sup>

(1) THE view is to be rejected that dogmatics is a historical science which has as its subject-matter the doctrines held by the Christian Church, or by one of its branches, and which even has its norm in the doctrinal decrees embodied in Creeds and Confessions.

*Note.*—The statement that the doctrines of the Church are the subject-matter of dogmatics, made by Schleiermacher and Rothe, is erroneous, but Romanism and Protestant Confessionalism fall into the graver error (which those thinkers avoided) of holding that doctrinal theology is ‘mechanically limited and finally judged by ecclesiastical statutes.’

<sup>1</sup> The propositions under *A* are mainly based on *Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, Bd. II., Einleitung.

(2) The function of Dogmatic Theology was conceived by the old Protestant School to be the attainment of a complete knowledge of the Christian revelation by reference to the standard of Holy Scripture; but it had no satisfactory theory as to the method by which to determine the interpretation of the inspired books that is normative for dogmatic theology.

*Note.*—An inspired Scripture is useless as a standard unless it is also an ‘understood’ Scripture. In opposition to the Roman theory that the key to its understanding is an oral tradition descending from the Apostles, Protestantism took the ground that Scripture is its own interpreter—meaning that the same Spirit which inspired it miraculously gives the understanding of it. But the assumption of this standing miracle is not justified, either by the observable conditions under which theological thinking is done, or by its results.

(3) The view that the function of dogmatics is to expound and systematise the data of the religious consciousness has been held in the form (a) that the data are those of the experience of the individual theologian—in which case we get a one-sided and unscientific presentation of Christianity, or (b) that the data are those of the collective Christian experience, in which case we are dealing with a magnitude too vast and complex to be accurately described.

*Note (a).* Example.—‘Theology is then, and only then, a free science when that which makes the Christian a Christian, viz. his personal relationship to God, makes the theologian a theologian in scientific knowledge of himself and utterances about himself; in other words, when I as a Christian am to myself as a theologian the specific subject-matter of my science.’—Hofmann, *Schriftbeweis*.

*Note (b).* Example.—‘The material of Dogmatics consists of the common inward experience upon which we may reckon, more or less, in all Christians.’—Lipsius.

(4) A theology which aims at the exposition of the authentic intellectual content of Christianity in positive and scientific form must derive it from the books of the New Testament, and from no other source.

(5) The general principle of the normative value of Scripture requires to be supplemented by—(a) an account of the grounds on which a unique function is ascribed to Scripture; and (b) a standard for the interpretation of its doctrinal content.

(6) The title of the New Testament writings to rank as normative rests—(a) not on their apostolic origin, since there is no evidence that the Apostles were uniquely inspired, and further, all the books are not apostolic; but (b) on the fact that they are the original and authentic sources for our knowledge of the Christian religion; while (c) they are further specifically distinguished by their insight into and relative dependence on the Old Testament records of the preparatory revelation.

*Note.*—‘The function of theology is to gain (for the purpose of guiding the Church in its ministry of teaching) an authentic knowledge of the Christian religion and revelation; but this knowledge can only be extracted from those documents, and from no other, which are near to the period of the foundation of the Church. This reflection is suggested by the law, which holds good for all ideas that have made history, that the content of a principle which brings a society into existence is apprehended in its full particularity at the beginning of the development, and that it is emasculated or modified in proportion as the activity of the society is extended and diffused.’

(7) The interpretation of Scripture cannot be required to conform to a doctrinal tradition of the Church, nor can infallibility be claimed for any ecclesiastical organ, or for the results of biblical interpretation.



(8) The New Testament material is heterogeneous, and account has to be taken by theology of the following points :—

- (a) The contrast between the position of Christ with His unique relation to God and to the Church which He founded, and that of the Apostles who spoke as representatives of the redeemed and believing society.
- (b) The character of the Apostolic writings, which are essentially religious or devotional, and not theological or speculative.
- (c) The presence in the Apostolic writings of elements which represent private opinions, or which are traceable to later Jewish thought.

(9) The New Testament writings, nevertheless, exhibit an essential unity, and the material for which this consensus can be claimed is normative for dogmatic theology.

*Note (a).*—‘The agreement in regard to the ideas with which we are here concerned is far-reaching, and the circle of the thoughts of Christ is in accord with the formally contrasted trains of thought formed by the Apostles.’

*Note (b).*—‘If the material is to be utilised for dogmatic theology, we shall unquestionably have to regard as normative all that can be shown to be the intellectual common good of the New Testament.’

*Summary Definition of the Christian Religion which emerges from and controls the Exegetical Results.*—‘Christianity is the monotheistic, completely spiritual, and ethical religion which, based on the life of its author as Redeemer and as Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral organisation of man-

kind, and grounds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God, as well as on the Kingdom of God.'—*R. u. V.*, E. Tr., iii. 13.

## B. THE SIFTING AND ELABORATION OF THE DOCTRINAL MATERIAL.

### I. *The Governing Principles.*

(1) *The Nature of Knowledge in General.*—Theology has usually operated with the Platonic theory that we can know things in themselves and apart from their effects. The Kantian theory that we cannot know things in themselves, and can only know phenomena, is held by Ritschl to be nearer the truth. The view adopted is that, while we do not know things in themselves, 'we know things in phenomena as the cause of the signs which they produce on us, as the end which they subserve as means, and as the law of constant changes.'—*R. u. V.*<sup>2</sup>, iii. 18 pp.

(2) *The Nature of Religious Knowledge.*—'Religious knowledge manifests itself in independent value-judgments, which have to do with the attitude of man to the world, and call forth feelings of pleasure and pain in which man either enjoys the dominion over the world which divine aid has vouchsafed him, or experiences with pain the lack of God's aid to that end.'

'Knowledge of God is demonstrably religious knowledge only when God is conceived in the relation of assuring to believers that position in the world which overbalances its hindrances.'—*R. u. V.*, iii. 202.

'Theology has to do, not like science with a disinterested theoretical knowledge of its objects,

but with a personal conviction that God, Christ, the work of Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Trinity, the Church, and all other religious magnitudes of Christianity, are present and operative for us to the end of our salvation.'—O. Ritschl, *Leben*, ii. 192.

- (3) *Condition of appropriating Religious Knowledge.*—'Revelation and Faith are inseparably connected. Truth is communicated, and creates knowledge when faith is awakened, when men are reconciled to God and called to His Kingdom. Where this does not take place, there is no knowledge—at most, the intellectual appropriation of a sacred tradition.'—Kaftan, *Dogmatik*<sup>1</sup>, p. 42.
- (4) *The Presupposition of Theology.*—'The theologian in his thinking takes his stand as a member of the Christian Church.'—*Leben*, ii. 184.
- (5) *Elimination of Natural Theology.*—'The theistic proofs are inconclusive, and natural theology has no contribution to make to Christian theology, which, indeed, it has to some extent adulterated.'—*Ibid.*, p. 192.

## II. *Distribution of the Material.*

- a. The Definition of Justification and its relations.
- b. The Presuppositions.  
God—Sin—The Person and the Work of Christ.
- c. The Proof.
- d. The Consequences: Ethical Christianity.

*Note.*—Doctrines affected by Ritschl's conception of the nature and limits of religious knowledge—the Divine Attributes, which are only known as relative; the Trinity, interpreted in Sabellian fashion, and not involving the personal pre-existence of Christ; the Person of Christ, interpreted as divine on the ground of the nature and value of His work; the Atonement construed apart from the presupposition of vindicative justice in God.



## APPENDIX J

## THE DISTINCTION OF FUNDAMENTAL AND NON-FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES

(1) THIS distinction, which is not recognised in Roman Catholic theology, was emphasised in the seventeenth century both in the Lutheran and Reformed Schools.

*Note.*—Luther, though critical of Scripture, regarded as fundamental all that he accepted as revealed: ‘De doctrina ne apiculum quidem remittere possumus; debet esse unus quidam perpetuus et rotundus aureus circulus; si verbum crederent esse verbum Dei, scirent unum verbum Dei esse omnia, omnia esse unum, item unum articulum esse omnes, omnes esse unum.’—*Opera* (Erl. Ausg.), xxiii. 258; Köstlin, *op. cit.* ii. 296.

(2) The original definition of fundamental doctrines in Lutheran theology was that they are those which are necessary to salvation,<sup>a</sup> and they were divided into primary<sup>b</sup>—the knowledge of which is a condition of salvation, and secondary<sup>c</sup>—the wilful denial of which entails the forfeiture of salvation, while the non-fundamental<sup>d</sup> were those which might be both ignored and denied.

*Note (a).*—*Articuli fidei fundamentales sunt qui talem habitudinem ad fundamentum fidei et salutis important, ut eo salvo ignorari aut saltem negari non possint.*

*Note (b).*—*Articuli primarii sunt praeicipuae partes doctrinae christianae, quarum distincta cognitio ad obtinendam fidem et salutem adeo necessaria est, et iis ignoratis nec fides generari aut conservari nec aeterna salus impetrari possit.*

*Note (c).*—*Articuli secundarii licet ignorari possint salvo salutis fundamento, negari tamen salvo illo non possunt.*

*Examples of (c).*—The characteristic properties of the Persons of the Trinity, original sin, God’s elective decree.

*Note (d).*—Articuli non-fundamentales sunt partes doctrinae christianae quae citra jacturam salutis ignorari et negari possunt.

*Examples.*—The cause of the fall of the angels, the date of Creation, the Antichrist, the traducian theory of the origin of souls.—Luthardt, *Compendium der Dogmatik*, c. 13.

(3) The Reformed divines also defined fundamental doctrines by their bearing on individual salvation,<sup>a</sup> but they divided them differently,<sup>b</sup> and regarded the Lutherans as improperly enlarging the list.

*Note (a).*—Quae omnibus fidelibus simpliciter et absolute necessaria sunt creditu, quaeque vel ignorari vel negari absque salutis dispendio nequeunt.

*Note (b)*—*α.* Error contra fundamentum—qui directe aut unum aut plures fidei articulos evertit, *e.g.* Christi divinitatem et Trinitatem personarum.

*β.* Error circa fundamentum—qui antithesim tenet, qua stante, indirecte et per necessariam consequentiam articulus evertitur, *e.g.* Providentiam Dei non agnoscere.

*γ.* Error praeter fundamentum—qui versatur circa quaestiones problematicas et curiosas, quae nec in Verbo sunt revelatae, nec scitu necessariae.

*δ.* Omnes consentiunt articulos fundamentales esse, Dogmata de Scriptura Sacra Θεοπνεύστῳ sola et perfecta fidei regula, de Deo Uno et Trino, de Christo Redemptore et plenissima ejus Satisfactione, De Peccato et morte ejus salario, De Lege et ejus impotentia ad salutem, De Justificatione per fidem, De Necessitate gratiae et bonorum operum ad Sanctificationem et Cultum Dei, De Ecclesia, de Resurrectione mortuorum, Judicio ultimo et Vita aeterna, et si quae alia hisce connexa sunt, quae omnia ita inter se copulantur, ut a se invicem pendeant, nec unum subduci queat quin caetera corruant.—Turretin, *Theologia Elenctica*, i. 14.

(4) Hooker accepted the conception of the 'foundation' as including the doctrines which are necessary to salvation, but he so expounded its content as not to exclude Roman Catholics from the pale of salvation.

*Note.*—The occasion of ‘The learned Discourse of Justification’ was to vindicate his assertion that ‘our fathers infected by popish errors and superstitions might be saved.’ The foundation is declared to be ‘that very Jesus whom the Virgin conceived of the Holy Ghost, whom the Jews crucified, whom the Apostles preached, He is Christ, the Lord, the only Saviour of the World.’—*Eccles. Polity*, 1850, ii. p. 625. Roman errors, as on Justification, are *circa fundamentum*, and may consist with holding this foundation.

(5) Following upon the rationalising diminution of the fundamental doctrines by the Socinian and Arminian schools,<sup>a</sup> the English Deists reduced them to the points of natural religion—viz. the existence of God, the obligation to worship Him by the service of righteousness, the necessity of repentance, and future retribution.<sup>b</sup>

*Note (a).*—The Socinians emphasised the practical side of religion as the one thing needful. The Arminians reduced the essentials to ‘faith in the divine promises, obedience to the divine precepts and due reverence for the Scriptures.’—Turretin, *ibid.*, i. 14, 1.

*Note (b).*—See especially Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate. De Religione Gentilium*.

(6) The rationalistic revolt of the eighteenth century gave rise to a prolonged discussion of the nature and range of the fundamental doctrines, which was taken part in by many of the prominent Anglican apologists, including Chillingworth, Stillingfleet, Sherlock, and Waterland.

*Note.*—In his *Discourse of Fundamentals*, Waterland rejected the definition which represents them as necessary to salvation, and conceived them as consisting of those doctrines which are an integral part of the Christian system.

The definition of fundamentals by reference to their bearing on salvation was abandoned on the ground that ‘we cannot presume to determine how far the divine mercies may extend towards men next to idiots, enthusiasts,



and even sensible and learned men erring fundamentally' (p. 93). 'The idea refers to the 'fabric of Christianity'; and the fundamental truths are those which are 'intrinsic or essential to the Christian covenant.' The articles held to be included in the Christian Covenant are (1) a Founder and principal Covenanter; (2) a subject capable of being covenanted with; (3) a Charter of Foundation; (4) a Mediator; (5) Conditions to be performed; (6) Aids or means to enable to performance; (7) Sanctions to bind the covenant and to secure obedience.

(7) Modern theology has regarded it as an urgent problem to distinguish between the fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and has largely discussed the question in the form of an exposition of the nature or essence of Christianity, but the discussion, while revealing agreement as to certain fundamental principles, has also disclosed differences of view as to the amount of doctrine which enters into the substance of the Christian religion.

(8) The modern discussion has commonly been conducted on the footing that the task is to enumerate, not the doctrines which must be believed or may not be denied as a condition of salvation, but those which give its distinctive character to, and which are required to support, the Christian scheme.

*Note.*—'The fundamental doctrines of Christianity,' says Schaff, 'are those which lie at the basis of the Christian scheme, and without which its professed and comprehensive aim (the glory of God and the highest welfare of man) could not, by logical necessity and with subjective certainty, be realised.'—Art. Schaff-Herzog's *Encyclopædia*.

(9) The irenical tendencies of recent times have led to attempts to formulate a list of fundamental doctrines representing the consensus of Evangelical Christianity,<sup>a</sup> and it has also been attempted to extract from the Protestant Confessions a sum of doctrine which could be made more binding as the essential and permanent faith of the Church.<sup>b</sup>

*Note (a).*—The Nine Articles of the Evangelical Alliance run as follows:—

- (1) The divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures.
- (2) The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.
- (3) The unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of the Persons therein.
- (4) The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the Fall.
- (5) The Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of atonement for the sins of mankind, and His mediatorial intercession and reign.
- (6) The justification of the sinner by faith alone.
- (7) The work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion and sanctification of the sinner.
- (8) The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the judgment of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous, and the eternal punishment of the wicked.
- (9) The divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Excellent as is this summary it may be pointed out that room should have been found to say what God is, that the most important of the means of grace should not have been ignored when the Sacraments are named, and that problems such as human origins and the final destiny of the wicked should not rank as fundamental articles.

*Note (b).*—So the simplified versions of the Westminster Confession executed by the Presbyterian Church of England and by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

(10) There is a valuable consensus of modern Protestant theology which, subject to differences of theological interpretation, includes the affirmation of—

- (1) The Reality of Revelation and the Authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God.

- 
- (2) The existence of God, the Infinite Spirit, almighty, all-wise, all-holy, all-loving—
  - (3) The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—
  - (4) The God of Creation and Providence.
  - (5) The divine image in man, and his subjection to the guilt and power of sin.
  - (6) The Divinity of Jesus Christ, His humiliation and exaltation, the work of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.
  - (7) Justification through faith in the mercy of God in Christ.
  - (8) The work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration and Sanctification, as mediated through the Word, Sacraments and Prayer.
  - (9) The obligation to holy and righteous living in the spirit of Christ and in the service of His Kingdom.
  - (10) The divine mission of the Church.
  - (11) The increase of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, the final judgment of the world, and the heavenly inheritance of them that are saved.

(11) The view that the Church possesses an adequate statement of fundamental doctrines in the Nicene Creed fails to take account of the fact that this Creed deals with only one of the three main heads of the Christian religion, and while the Apostles' Creed is more comprehensive, it errs by excess in including such articles as the Descensus ad Inferos, and it errs still more by defect in that it throws no light upon the conditions of salvation, and lays no emphasis on the duty of following Christ and of advancing His Kingdom.

(12) An enumeration of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity must include at the least (*a*) a list of the blessings of the Christian religion; (*b*) the Christian doctrine of God—revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and (*c*) a statement of the gracious conditions on which man enjoys forgiveness and has the promise of eternal life, and of the consequent aspirations and obligations of the Christian calling.



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at the Edinburgh University Press









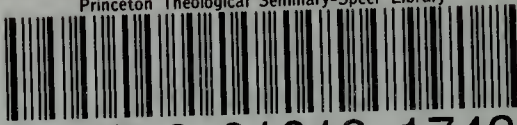


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